

The background of the cover is a photograph of a misty forest path. A person is walking away from the viewer on the left side of the path. The path is covered in fallen leaves and is illuminated by a warm, golden light. The trees are bare and the overall atmosphere is eerie and mysterious.

A Collection of Ghost Stories Vol. I

Neil Wesson

“You need only four things to inspire the writing
of a ghost story, MR James, Charles Dickens,
Richard Wagner and...

...a lot of lunchtime drinking.”

NW.

I would like to extend my thanks to...

Rebecca Hardy

&

Louise Brameld

for editing this book.

Thanks must be given also to my son Sam (age 5 $\frac{3}{4}$) for the
inspiration for the story Lost Luggage.

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Return to Old Ellaby

Over the last two centuries countless ghost stories have been told on a dark cold winters evening, many of these have had a railway station as their location. This little tale is no different to them except in one detail, this story is a true tale. How do I know?

As someone once said 'Because I was there'. The rambler who seeks sanctuary from the freezing fog was myself.

I myself am now eighty three years old and I had to put this story down on paper before I die.

What follows are the events (as I remember them) that happened on a cold winter's night in February 1963.

The line now stood abandoned, Lord Beachems axe had fallen some fifteen years since. Where the majestic old steam engines once ran up and down the branch line linking Hull to Hornsea only a footpath and cycle track now remain. The occasional hiker or cyclist now traversed the once busy line, only the station's remained such as the old Victorian station house situated half a mile from the village of Old Ellaby. The warm inviting light shone out from the windows into the fog bound darkness of that February night.

The building had lain empty for many years, the only inhabitants included the nocturnal creatures of the area, and the occasional vagrant. Nine months previous, a retired doctor and his wife had bought the building. His worsening heart condition had forced him into an early retirement, but at fifty five he needed a new project and this was it.

Where there were once waiting rooms and ticket offices now there stood living rooms, kitchens and bathrooms, all the modern comforts and all done at his own hand. Both the interior and exterior were styled on the Victorian era, a tribute to the original builders of the line. Although the medical profession had taken him into its sphere, he always had been a fan of the Victorian engineers and the railway builders most of all. Men like Stephenson and Brunnel had always been heroes to him.

Doctor Majester and his spouse, Catherine were in the midst of hosting a dinner party to celebrate the finishing of the final part of the redevelopment. Two guests sat at the table, Ian and Karen Hanson who were old friends of the hosts. Much merriment had taken place during the evening so far and throughout the meal. Most of the conversation had been spent on nostalgia and their collective salad days.

Now the meal was over, the two men both held a large glass of brandy in one hand and a cigar in the other while the women sat over two steaming cups of black coffee.

"You've done a marvellous job on this old place," commented Ian Hanson. His florid face looking around the maroon painted walls. Silhouetted profiles hung on the walls as well as the framed images of steam engines hanging down from the picture rail. A grand father clock stood in the corner of the room was striking ten o'clock.

"It cost a fortune," said Catherine, as the last chimes died away, "he had to have genuine 1880's fixtures, fittings and well, everything. Taps, Door handles, you name it.

"It all looks so new though." Karen added not really knowing what to say, Victoriana was not her strongest suit.

The brandy-laden houseguest was the first up from the table, loosening his belt discretely as he crossed the room. He came to rest by the hearth, turning his back to the fire, he felt the heat prickling on the backs of his legs. Turning to retrieve his glass off of the mantle piece Ian's eye was taken by one of the numerous objects sitting above the fire. Next to the carriage clock sat an old Acme Thunderer whistle, now heavily tarnished with age. Picking it up he examined it in the closest detail. It was obviously old, but the original pea was still in tack, "What's this old man." He asked his old friend.

"Oh just something I found in what's left of the chippings' outside." For some reason unknown to the other three assembled dinners, the doctors manner had turned somewhat cold and distant. His attention seemed to be taken by the window leading directly out onto the platform.

“What on earth’s the matter Edward?” Karen asked with a concerned tone in her voice.

“Oh, er nothing, just not sleeping very well at the moment. I just seem to slip off now and again.” His mind was on other things, that face, the face that haunted his sleeping hours. Had he seen it pass the window? If someone or something had passed the window no one else had seen it.

An uneasy silence befell the room. Was it the Doctors imagination, or had the temperature in the room dropped? “It’s a strange thing,” Edward broke the silence, his tone was grave, so much so that everyone turned giving him their full attention. “It’s funny Ian that you should mention that old whistle, it’s since I found that thing that my nightmares started.”

“What nightmares?” his wife asked a look of concern showing on her face. She knew he was not sleeping well, as for the reason for his unrest she had no idea.

“About two weeks ago I found that piece down in the ground at the south end of the north bound platform. I picked it up and jumped up onto the platform to take advantage of better sunlight and to see what I had found. It looked very much like an old Stationmaster’s whistle. I stood looking up the line trying to imagine what it must have looked like a hundred years ago. I raised the whistle up to my lips and blew. It was full of soil, but I still managed to raise a shrill note out of it.

As I turned to come back into the warmth of the house I caught sight of what I presumed to be a rambler coming down the line. Something told me that he, whoever he was, was worth a second look. I turned back to look northward up the line, but I saw no one. I presumed it must have been the shadows in the trees forming the outline of a man.

That night I had the dream that has troubled me to this day. It really is the strangest of things, I was here, not now though, years ago when the station was active. It was a very busy station then.” His voice was distant as though reaching back through time, he was no longer in the here and now, but remembering days gone by. “It was a cold February morning, but I was in my

shirt sleeves and waistcoat, the sleeves of the shirt rolled up, my arms cold, the end of my nose numb.

A slow moving cattle train came through the station. It was due to stop off at the cattle loading platform around the bend in the track. I can see it as clearly as I can see you three. It slowly rolled through and as it slowed to a stop around the partly tree lined bend. It looked hazy in the dream, though the sun was shining. I took a drink from the hip flask, which I held in my right hand. In the other hand I held a whistle, very similar to the one in your hand Ian. I can remember which hand I was in. Under my arm I had two flags, one green, one red.

The signal remained in its lower position, the light shining green, it did not change. No, that's because it was my job to change it. That was my job, Station Master and Signaller for that one solitary signal. It was cold on the platform so I took another drink from the hip flask before going back into the Station House."

The sound of a knock came from the direction of the front door. It brought the three diners back to the present with a jolt, the doctor remained in the past, "I'll go," said Catherine leaving the table, "I cannot imagine who it could be at this time of night though?"

As his wife disappeared out of the room the Doctor continued his tale. "The next thing I am aware of is waking up in this very room, my, or should I say the Station Masters office, the fire is blazing. The bell is ringing, traffic coming up the line, the express is on its way. It would stop, though today the signal is at red, the cattle train was still off loading.

Had he changed the signal? I could not remember doing the actual act of pulling the lever, yes of course I had, and I always did. That was my job.

The noise of the engine wasn't right though. By the sound it was at full steam, not powering down like it should have been. I jumped out of my chair knocking over the empty hip flask, which fell to the floor from its resting place on the chair arm.

I hurried to put on my hat and coat, they wouldn't go on correctly, I felt disorientated falling against the wall next to the

door at one point. How long had I been asleep? I did not know. In a state of half undress I rushed out onto the platform. No one was there, the express was not in service on this pass, the carriages were empty.

The train thunders through the station, the cut is filled with smoke and steam making visibility difficult. The last two cars of the train passed me, the only thing I saw was the guard at the rear of the brake van hanging his flask up next to the red flashing lamp denoting the end of the train. The brake van disappeared around the bend in the track.

“How had this happened?” I said to myself, I looked up at the signal. Now I come to think about it, I was standing in the same spot as I stood the other day when I found that whistle. The signal, the signal was at green.” The Doctor was speaking even more slowly now. “It was all my fault. I must have been worse for wear with drink and not changed the signal.” He sat back in his chair exhausted by the tale. His eyes stared into the middle distance. Remorse filled his heart.

“It was only a dream.” The reassuring voice of Karen spoke calmly to him, reaching out to his troubled soul.

The attentions of the two guests were temporally taken by the returning of Catherine into the room and she was not alone. Following closely behind her was the figure of a man, well wrapped up against the cold winter weather. On entering the room he made straight for the fire, bending down in front of it and outstretching his hands toward its warm glow.

Catherine, leaving him to warm himself by the fire came over to the table to inform her husband and guests of the newcomer’s situation. “This young man got lost when the fog came down. He’s on his way to Hornsea. The poor man looks half frozen to death, I told him he could come and warm himself by the fire, he’s been walking all day.”

“I’ll take a look at him, give him a quick check over in a moment.” Said Dr Majester. Before standing from his chair to attend to the latest guest he finished his story of his dream.

“I heard the slamming on of the brakes, screeching through the cold morning air. The thumping sound of the boiler added to the

plumes of smoke coming from the funnel rising over the trees clearly indicated to me that the driver had put the engine into reverse. The iron wheels scraped along the rails, sparks flew up from where ever metal touched metal. The mighty engine continued towards the last truck in the stationary cattle train. The driver of the express blew the whistle in vain, even if the driver of the cattle train had been aware of the approaching engine there was no time to react, the slow moving tank engine could not pick up enough speed to outrun the express.

Know all was lost the driver and fireman leaped out of the cab both landing in the soft ploughed field that lined the track.

The almighty sound of the crash came as the back end of the brake van of the freight train ripped off the smoke box of the express. The express pushes the smaller train two hundred yards up the line before running out of steam. Fortunately the freight train was empty of people or beast, as was the engine of the express, the guard in the brake van was thrown across the compartment and instantly broke his neck on the brake wheel in the centre of the car, death was instant.

I suppose it was lucky that there was only one causality from the crash.”

“You are speaking as though it actually happened Edward.” Ian was puzzled, was his old friend loosing his mind? Could he no longer determine reality from dreams?

“The other day I took out the last of the old cupboards in the out house and I found this.” He hands an old newspaper cutting from his breast pocket to Ian who once furnishing his nose with a pair of reading glasses studied the piece. “It is a report of the crash in my dreams.”

“Just a coincidence, I’m sure of that, after all we are both men of science we cannot condone a link between dreams and reincarnation.”

“No, no of course not.” Faltered the doctor as he walked over too the newcomer. As he did Catherine gave a concerned look at her two oldest friends.

The rambler still remained bent over the fire, "Now my man." Said the doctor, "Let me take a look at you, it's alright I am a Doctor."

The walker slowly turned to face the Doctor as he became upright. His features were obscured, his hood remained over his head covering his face. His hands slowly came up to his head to remove the obstacle.

At the table the two women spoke in hushed voices about Edward, "Is he alright?" Karen asked Catherine.

"I don't know, he's been a bit distant these last few days. He won't tell me why, you know what he's like. This is the first I've heard of any of this."

Doctor Majester suddenly felt a dread the like of which he had never experienced before. Not only had someone walked over his grave, but he felt as though he was been buried alive. A pain shot across his chest as his heart spasms out of control. The last thing he saw before he fell to the floor was the hideous burnt and twisted face of the guard he had last seen disappearing into the trees from the back of the break van of the Hull to Hornsea express of 1888.

FINI

“Heaven knows no Rage”

We have all often heard the almost frequently miss quoted line from the French writer Congeave...

“Heaven knows no rage like love to hatred turned, or Hell a fury as a women’s scorn.”

It is often used in reference to women seeking revenge on their husbands and partners dalliances of philandering. It is seldom used to refer to a man's relationship with a woman, in life or death.

The ceilings were high in the semi-detached houses of the leafy street. High ceilings, just what was needed. The master bedrooms design complied with the rest of the houses architecture. He stood at the foot of the bed looking up at the point on the ceiling where the cord suspending the light emerged. The shade was a heavy glass bowl, far too heavy to be supported by the electric cable alone. A decorative chain hung down from a brass hook, the screws of which penetrated deep into a joist under the plaster. He knew it would hold he’d put it up.

The stool from her dressing table wobbled on the quilted bed as he stepped onto it. He held onto the light fitting with one hand to support himself, the other hand was occupied with something else.

From the hook in the ceiling, which the gold colour chain hung, now a white piece of cord was also suspended. It was the type of cord normally used for the hanging of pictures down from a picture rail. On the bedroom wall a square of light blue stood out from its darker surrounding’s. The plain untarnished piece of wallpaper indicated where a picture had once hung.

She wouldn’t like that, he would have to replace it. No maybe not.

The stool wobbled again under him, he transferred his weight to counteract the fall. He didn’t want to fall, he could have broken a

leg, or an arm or even his back. What a strange thought, worried about breaking a limb?

Steadying himself he put the makeshift noose around his neck, he couldn't make a proper noose, she was right. He was useless. With one final look around the bedroom, the bedroom he had shared with his wife for the past eleven years, he was happy here once.

He kicked away the stool.

If he were to have any second thoughts then now it was too late. His home made noose tightened perfectly. So he wasn't that useless after all.

His legs swung out of control, as did his arms. The blood began to back up in the lower part of his neck then he began to feel faint.

The last image his eyes saw was a silver framed picture on the dresser. It was of a happy day, an informal picture taken on their wedding day.

The image faded.

She closed the kitchen door behind her. The smell of something cooking in the oven filled her nostrils. Outside it was getting dark, the sun had set some twenty five minutes earlier. Mid summers day had only just past and the nights were still short, she liked this time of year.

The smell was unmistakable to her, it was lasagne, her favourite. He cooked it so well, were was he? Why wasn't he in the kitchen, he normally was. Her husband was a creature of habit.

On the average day he would arrive home at 5.30pm normally and have dinner ready for her coming home at around 9.30pm. A fresh pot of tea would be awaiting her on arrival. He knew very well that if she ate too late in the evening then she would be up all night with either a headache or an attack or stomach cramps.

The teapot was empty, much her displeasure, so was a bottle of wine standing next to the coffee grinder.

"Right." She said to herself. He was in for a roasting now. It was perfectly obvious to her what had happened. He must have come home, put the dinner in the oven, drank the contents of the bottle

then fallen asleep on the bed while he had been upstairs. "Tough then." She thought to herself, tonight he would go without his dinner if he couldn't be bothered to come down.

At midnight she decided it was time to retire to bed and see what state her husband was in. He could be so lazy sometimes; she had been working all day at the office.

He too had been working all day, she never spared him a second thought. He was a builder by trade and spent his entire working life lifting, carrying and going up and down ladders with various pieces of equipment. It was hard physical work, on more than one occasion he had worked to the point of exhaustion. What kept him in the trade? The money was good, the more work completed the better payday at the end of the week.

He needed the money.

Making as much noise as possible she climbed the stairs. He no doubt would hear her coming and jump off the bed, pretending to be folding up washing or some other task.

Tonight though such an act would not wash with her. Why had he not come downstairs when she had come home? If he thought that this morning's lecture had been hard to take, then the one he was about to receive would make the previous pale into insignificance. By the time she had reached the top step her rage was at boiling point. She flung open the bedroom door and hit the dimmer switch with the side of her fist.

Shock and a feeling of sickness hit her as she saw her husband's lifeless body hanging in the centre of the room. The white cord around his neck tied off the hook supporting the light.

A second emotion swept over her, horror. What had happened? Did he do this himself or had someone else...

That thought was too horrible to contemplate.

Then anger once again surfaced, "Lazy sod." He'd taken the easy way out. He would rather kill himself than be with me.

Two hours later the Police had been and gone. Their investigations hadn't taken long to complete, it was definitely suicide. The body of her husband had also been taken away in an ambulance. Now she sat alone in the living room. It was the

early hours of the morning now and the rest of the world was asleep.

Her mother would be arriving shortly to pick her up and take her back to the childhood home she knew so well. She had been advised to spend a few days away from the house, 'to come to terms with her loss.' As the Police councillor had put it.

What loss? How selfish could he have been, doing that in the house.

Moments later she was gone, the house was empty and silent.

Well almost empty.

On the mantle piece sat his mobile phone. If anyone had bothered to check the previously dialled numbers they would have found the last five numbers had all been the same, 909090, the Samaritans.

The conversation could have been any of life's lost souls. It followed the same pattern as a thousand others that week...

"It's my wife, she treats me like a..."

"Like what?" came back the friendly voice on the other end of the line?

"A butler, servant," a pause then, "a slave." Said his melancholy voice.

"Has she harmed you in any way?"

"No, not yet."

"She just treats you badly?"

"Yes."

"Have you spoken to her about it?"

"I have tried."

"That's good, and what did she say?"

"She always says it's my fault, I am to blame for everything that goes wrong or missing. I can't do anything right." His voice had started to falter. "She's told me that so many times that I've started to believe myself now."

"Have you considered leaving your wife?"

"I can't"

“Why not?” the voice of the women on the phone had a strangely calming effect on him. Maybe things weren’t that bad after all.

“”I can’t afford it. All my money goes on the house, paying the bills and that sort of thing. Her money we use for food. If I left I’d have nowhere to go and no money to survive.”

“That’s not true, do you have any friends or relations you could stay with?”

“I’ve got to go now, she’s just come in.”

“Wait,” said the voice, “There are hostel’s you can go too...” the councillor couldn’t get another word in, he was gone, the line dead.

For three days the house remained empty.

On her return she sat in the car looking at the exterior. A feature stood in the garden that had not been there on her departure. A white board had been erected, the legend on the top read ‘FOR SALE’.

Soon she would out of this house and on with her new life.

Late on that evening the time finally came, it was time to go to bed, time to go into that bedroom. The room was warm and inviting, she changed into her nightclothes and slipped between the sheets. With the remote control beside her she watched the small portable television mounted on the wall. Cupped in her two hands she held a mug full of hot chocolate.

While she was taking a sip of her hot sweet drink she noticed a dark shadow cross the TV screen, then return to normal

The tube must be on its way, she thought to herself. She could afford a newer better one now, after that thought she slept well in the large empty bed.

The following night followed a similar pattern. Again the shadow moved across the screen, darker this time. The old set must be getting worse. Over the next few nights the picture quality on the bedroom TV slowly became unwatchable, by Friday the shadow was moving from one side to the other.

She began to nod off, did she imagine it in the moment between the worlds of sleep and semi consciousness or was the shadow in the room and not on the screen. She slowly drifted off to sleep. Then all of a sudden she sat bolt upright in bed, she was looking at the TV. The shadow was in the room with her, it was swinging side to side, the harder she looked at it the more it formed a shape. The shape of a body hanging from the ceiling. She fainted with fear, falling back onto her pillow.

The next morning she woke with a start. The TV was still switched on, the picture was perfect. The sun shone in through the south facing window. It was warm and bright outside. Had she dreamt the events of the previous night? She was not sure now, it could have been a dream. She hoped it was.

The long awaited house move came two days later. She was glad to be putting the past behind her. A new bedroom awaited her, a new room with no 'Ghosts' from the past.

The day had been a busy one, moving a lifetime's amount of possessions took military planning. Two rooms she insisted on being operational by the end of the first day, one was the kitchen and the other was the main bedroom, all the rest could wait until the morning. By eleven in the evening both rooms were in some kind of operational state.

The usual mug of hot chocolate was poured before climbing over the boxes and chests toward the stairs and then on to bed.

The new portable TV was still in its box, so tonight she would read a book in bed. After the exhaustions of the day she soon began to nod off.

As she placed her book on the bedside table she took a sideways glance at the lightfitted, nothing was there, at last she had escaped that awful room, the room she had once loved.

At 3am she woke, a dry feeling in her mouth. She would go to the bathroom and get herself a glass of water.

Where was she? Nothing was right to her eyes. Then it came to her. A new house, a new start, she sat up and felt a dread in her

chest. For some unknown reason she felt paralysed she couldn't move.

What was it, then it hit her.

Even though she was in a new house, a new bedroom she could never escape the past.

Infront of her she could clearly see it now, the image of her dead husband silently hanging from the ceiling.

FINI

The Search for Melton Top

The two sexagenarian's greeted each other with a handshake, they hadn't seen one another for, what was it now, twenty five years?

Much had changed here over the past forty years since they had last stood on this spot. The location for this reunion was Hessle foreshore looking out across the Humber Estuary. Much had changed over the years the most obvious development in that time had to be the single span suspension bridge which stretched out across the river linking East Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. Many other things had changed in this part of the county since two young men had trodden the footpaths and byways that collectively form the Wold's Way.

It was forty years ago that the two old friends had walked the eighty or so miles of the Wolds Way together and now they were about to embark on part of that journey again. Their respective bodies had past the point of fitness to complete the full journey long a go, but they had to do this last part once more. The stretch between the villages of Hessle and Welton would be re-walked, this time in reverse to their first attempt.

Ian and Neil had been at school together, then trained together as engineers. The War had come along and like all the men of their age been sent overseas to fight the ensuing threat posed by the forces of tyranny.

They served together in Burma, both were captured and held in the same POW camp.

After the War they were shipped home. After three years in the tropical jungle they wanted to see the rolling hills of England again and where better then at home Yorkshire. So before returning to their everyday jobs they decided to walk the Wolds Way.

Setting off from Filey it took them a week to get close to home. As they passed the village of Welton it was starting to get dark.

With only three or four miles to go they wanted to push on and finish it.

As they reached the wood at Melton Top the warm inviting glow of a pub shone out into the darkness. In the dark it was not easy to make out what it looked like, but it had two stories and at least ten windows on the upper level.

“Come on, let’s get a drink.” Neil said enthusiastically.

“Well I suppose it’s too dark to carry on.” Ian replied. No need for any coaxing there. The two young men made for the door Neil pushed it open in eager anticipation of a sit down and a pint. The door was made up of three panels of roughly sworn wood. It was difficult to see, but in the darkness he could see no sign of a lock. “Strange?” he said to himself as they entered. As the interior become visible to them their faces dropped in disbelief.

“Are you up for this?” Ian asked Neil. He had always been the fitter of the two. Both were keen sportsmen in their youth with Ian always having the slight advantage over his friend in the more physical disciplines were as Neil had the edge over him in games requiring dexterity and skill.

“I don’t know, we’ll have to see. Should be though, we’ve walked a lot further.”

“We were a lot younger then though.”

“That’s true.” Come on then.” Ian led the way, walking off up the foreshore.

Leaving the monument marking the finishing point of the Wolds Way behind them the two old men set off to find the place they sought. It had been the topic of conversation many times over the years, but neither of them had ever returned to that place.

The two engineers stopped for a moment directly under the Humber Bridge. They stood and looked up in awe.

“Now that’s what I call proper engineering.” Neil commented looking up at the north tower.

“Bit bigger then anything we ever knocked up.”

“Ey. You would know, you did bigger projects then I ever did.”

Ian had stayed in engineering all his working life. Neil however had become a writer a few years after the war. The conflict had

left a profound affect on his life and he had published many books based on his own and his friend's experiences.

One mile further up River the footpath turned away from the waterfront and headed up hill and in land. The path was still lined by a bank of trees on either side, but now houses were built almost up to the edge of one side of the path. The sun shone through the branches causing a strange temperature change as they walked through shade to light.

At the top of this part of the track the unmistakable sound of heavy traffic greeted them. In 1948 there was no road here only a farm track. Now the only safe way across the busy A63 was via a steel footbridge a quarter of a mile down the road.

Neil entered the public house first followed closely by Ian. "Oh my God." Ian whispered into Neil right ear. It was the first time ever he had ever heard his friend use the Almighty's name in vain, or as a matter of fact with any type of reference.

The room was nothing like any public house either of the two of them had ever been in. No pictures advertising brewers products adorned the wall. No horse brasses lashed to leather straps, even the bar was wrong. No pumps, no logos.

As the two twenty something's walked up the bar all heads turned to view them. Who were these two young men with their strange clothes and bags on their backs?

Neil was the first to the bar. Behind it lay four large wooden barrels lying on their side, all had a tap fitted to the front end and a spile wedged in the top. Ian stood closely behind Neil and was taking a good look around the bar. Most pubs these days had mirrors behind the bar, but not this one he observed. Looking round it was clear to him that this pub needed bringing into the mid twentieth century.

No electric lights were to be seen anywhere in this establishment or for that matter any gas light fittings. He supposed that it was quite possible. The pub was high on the hill, miles away from the nearest village. Maybe electric hadn't made it as far out, maybe the supply had been bombed and not yet reconnected. It

is a little known fact that Hull and the surrounding area where heavily bombed by the Luftwaffe emptying their cargo on the way back to Germany.

The room was illuminated by candle light only, behind each flickering lone flame was a polished metal plate, the sort of thing that was done in the middle ages. Ian turned his attention to one of the customers in the bar. It looked as though they had made their own cloths. Being from the city Ian put this down to country living, he knew no better.

“Two pints of Bitter please.” asked Neil in a cheery voice. The thickset barman looked up with a disagreeable look on his rough face.

“Pints?” he grunted. The barman who was the landlord was more of an ogre than man. His hands were covered in warts, his face was red and blotchy, almost like a plague victim. The towel he carried over his shoulder could be only be described as a rag the colour of reddish earth. “Jugs, you mean?”

“Er, yes, jugs.” Neil replied, not wanting to incur the wrath of this man.

The landlord put two mugs down on the bar, they looked home made, rough and irregular in shape, that summed up this place in Ian’s eyes, rough and very irregular. From under the bar his wart ridden hand took a large jug which was in a similar style to the mugs, he turned and filled it from one of the barrels. Once full he slammed it down on the bar, beer slopping over the sides. “Quarter.”

Neil looked at Ian, who returned his blank look. “Sorry?”

“Quarter.” He repeated.

From his pocket, Neil too a handle full of coins. “Er I don’t have a quarter of...”

“That one.” The landlord pointed at the one penny piece in his hand.

For a jug of beer Neil gladly handed the penny over. The two walkers sat down in the corner out of the way. Once seated the locals returned to their drinks and conversations.

“What’s going on here?” Neil’s voice was full of excitement.

“I don’t know, it’s like a through back to the middle ages.”

"I know, fantastic isn't it."

"No it isn't. We drink up then go." Ian had a feeling that all was not right here.

"What, he only want a quarter of a penny for a jug of ale, we've got three left in the barrel."

The conversation levels around the room dropped to a whisper as the locals intently watched the two new comers. No one new had come here for years.

"You two." Shouted the landlord who remained standing behind the bar, "Where are you from?"

"Is he talking to us?" Ian asked.

"I think so, best answer him. If not we might not be out of here alive."

"Hull." He answered.

"Hull? What the river? Is that why you wear such strange clothes?"

"Er no, not the river, the city around it."

"Oh Wyke." Added a man sitting in the shadows somewhere to the right of the bar.

"Wyke." The word echoed around the bar, everyone saying the word at least once followed by a hum of recognition. Neil was a something of an historian and knew that before Hull had been granted the Kings charter almost 800 years ago the town was called Wyke. Before Ian could answer Neil butted in, "Yes, that's right."

"You're not local then?" asked a voice, it could have emanated from anywhere from in the mass of bodies hidden in the dark corners.

"This is freaking me out." Ian said in a hushed worried tone.

"Don't worry. These people are just a bit different from us, it's their way."

"I don't fancy stopping here tonight."

"We can't go on tonight. The footpath in both directions goes through the wood, we wouldn't stand a chance. If we tried walking tonight we could end up in the quarry. Anyway it's not that bad here." The beer was starting to take effect on him, it always hit Neil first, Ian's tolerance was a little higher.

Maybe Neil was right, after all they would be under cover here and warm.

The landlord was speaking to what they took for his wife. She was just about as ugly as he was. Were they talking about them or was it just they're paranoia?

The women disappeared into the back room, her instructions had been given. "Are you two gentlemen having another jug?" asked the landlord. This time his voice was calm and friendly

"Er, yes." The boys replied almost simultaneously. They didn't know which was worse, the landlord being friendly or offensive. Neil began to stand to make the trip to the bar.

"No, no. I'll bring it over yonder." Once full the landlord brought the jug of beer over.

The brew was not the normal type of ale the boys were used too. It was very watery and not the remotest sign of a head on it. It did though have the desired effect on the senses that all good liquor should have. After the second jug Ian and Neil's apprehensions had disappeared and they were quite enjoying themselves, even conversing with some of the locals.

It may have been the effect of the beer, but no one in the pub seemed to know anything of modern day life. The War had not been mentioned, entering any public place especially a pub the talk was of nothing else. Where the locals enjoying a joke at the expense of the two visitors who had so recently arrived in the pub?

"Will you be staying the night?" asked the landlord.

"I think we may have too." Neil said with a smile on his face. This could turn out to be a good night after all.

"You'll have to share."

"That'll be fine." Neil laughed. "I'm sure we can be trusted with each other." Ian joined in the joke laughing loudly. The whole pub also appeared to in on the joke as a ripple of laughter circled the pub.

Suddenly the atmosphere changed as the door blew open blowing all the straw lining the floor across the room forming a pile against the bar.

One of the regulars jumped up and closed the door, as it shut the merriment continued.

The last jugs of beer was finished and taken away, only the dregs remained and the two mugs sat on the table. Most of the locals had left now, curiously passing comments such a “ have a good night” and “enjoy yourselves.” To Neil and Ian as they left.

Only half a dozen remained now finishing their drinks. The two boys would reply politely not knowing what else to say.

The back door behind the bar opened and two young girls came through into the bar. They were in their late teens, probably twins by the look of them, yes definitely twins.

They came out and positioned themselves uncomfortably near Ian and Neil.

“Ah, I seen you have met my daughters, they will show you to your rooms. Annie, Mary say hello.”

Both the girls gave a shy look and quietly offered their greeting. Ian was sure that they had said “My Lords” and the end of the muttered greeting.

“Rooms?” he asked. Though the beer was flowing freely he remained strangely sober. “I thought we were sharing?”

Even Neil in his slightly inebriated state mentally pulled himself together at that point.

“Oh you will be.” said the master of the house.

The two girls led the two young lads out to the back of the inn and up the only flight of stairs. Annie stopped outside a door.

“This is your room sir.” She said looking at Ian.

“If this is my room then who am I sharing with?”

“Why, with me sir.” Ian’s’ eye brows raised as high as his forehead would allow, the look of shock which he gave to Neil soon changed to a beatific smile.

Mary was standing at the next door along, “And your in here, with me Sir.” She gestured to Neil.

The two flimsy doors closed as the two couples disappeared into the rooms.

In the bar the landlord drank a mug of beer while his wife cleared the tables. “That’s two new sources of breeding into the village”

“We have to take whatever we can when it comes along.”

The line of trees was on a slight incline and bent round to the right. It had been hard work for the two old men, but they knew that they had to get to the top, their goal was close at hand.

Both of the sixty year olds were becoming increasingly out of breath. A hint of excitement spurred them on. Neither of them had mentioned the pub were they stopped forty years ago, somehow though they knew each other was thinking about it. When they had arranged this walk they both had firmly in their minds why they wanted to do it.

Both of them were wheezing like a grampus when they made it to the top. They looked around, there was no sign of the pub. There was a building, but that was a camping hut used by the scouts, the purple logo gave that away. A fire had been burning recently, its charred remains lay in a clearing in amongst the trees.

“It was here.” said Ian in disbelief.

“It can’t have been.”

“It must have, I don’t think I’ll ever forget that morning.”

Neil looked around, “Look at the trees, there too old too have grown in forty years. It takes a couple of hundred years to grow this big.”

“So were was it then?”

“I don’t know. I thought it was here as well.”

“I must have been here.” disappointment was in Ian’s voice.

“Come on, Welton is just down the hill, we’ll go and have a pint in the Green Dragon.”

Both men set off once again, “At least its down hill from here.”

Neil tried to cheer his old friend up. The thought of going for a well earned pint did that alone.

Neil woke early the next morning. Light was shining through the hole in the outside wall. It was a hole, not a window, no glass protected the interior from the elements.

The bed he woke up in was uncomfortable, hard and itchy. Still lying next to him lay Mary, he remembered the previous night.

He had drank much but still could remember. How strange it was, the landlord giving his daughters to them, what was the catch.

Getting out of bed he walked over to the window. He could see the river and the patchwork of fields growing all manner of various grains. One thing puzzled him, he was sure a telegraph pole was in the field at the bottom of the valley.

Now in daylight even though the sun had not yet made it above the horizon he could see the room clearly now. The previous night it had been illuminated by candlelight only, one of them still burnt. What a state it was in, it was no more than a barn.

Suddenly he froze to the spot, he could hear someone outside in the corridor.

Two pints of Bitter sat on a circular table in the Green Dragon pub. Behind each glass sat a melancholy man. Both remained silent for several minutes, both thinking of the night in that pub forty years earlier.

“Are you alright Gents?” asked the landlord as he passed, “Nothing wrong with the beer I hope?”

“No. No the beers fine.” Replied Neil.

“We’ve lost something.” Ian said to him.

“Oh yes and what’s that?” asked the middle aged innkeeper sitting down on a stool next to the table.

Neil decided to take up the tale, “About forty years ago we walked the Wolds Way. When we where up at Melton Top we stopped at the pub for the night. The landlord was, er, most accommodating.”

“On Melton Top?” asked the curious landlord.

“Yes.” Ian said sharply as he entered the conversation. It sounded to him that the landlord didn’t wholly believe them.

“It can’t have been on Melton Top.”

“It was, I can assure of that. I realise it was many years ago, but it was their.”

“Hold on.” said the landlord, “I’ve got a very good book about the village upstairs, I’ll go and get it, keep an eye on the bar for me.” He left them alone for a while. There was no need to worry

about the bar, they were the only two customers in the pub that afternoon.

Neil stood like a statue trying to make out what was being said outside in the corridor. The voices were muffled, but after a short while he began to get the gist of the conversation.

It was the landlords' voice that was the most prevalent. "Did they both receive?"

The other voice he presumed was his wife's, it was low and he wasn't able to make out anything recognisable.

"Did you actually see them being seeded?"

My God, she must have been watching the door was riddled with cracks. What kind of sick voyeurs were they?

"So if they did then they are ours, it's only ten minutes until sunrise, then they'll never leave. Once the sun comes up we will be back home."

What the hell was going on here? He knew they had to get out now. It was a shame to leave the supine young women there in the bed, last night, what he could remember of it was fantastic.

He had to warn Ian. He couldn't go out into the corridor, the freak show where out there He and Ian had both been members of the Sea Scouts in their youth, this would stand them in good stead now, he only hoped that Ian had retained his knowledge of Morse Code. Knocking on the adjoining wall between their rooms he tapped out a warning, "Danger must leave now"

Yes he had heard, a reply came back. "Get lost going for another one"

Come on Ian, "danger danger must leave now"

The door of his bedroom opened. He held his breath, Ian came in.

"We've got to get out of here, I heard them talking. They're going to keep us here for their daughters. Get what you can carry."

"Ok." Ian had never seen Neil be so serious in his life, he knew something was wrong. Ian returned to his room and dressed himself, he looked at the bed, would it be that bad to stay here with her?

“Come on.” Neil’s whispered voice came from outside the room. Ian tiptoed out of his room. As he did so Annie opened an eye and saw him leaving.

“Father.” She screamed at the top of her voice.

“Hell.” Neil said as the landlord appeared at the end of the corridor, a pitchfork in his hands.

“Where do you think you’re going?” he growled.

“Run.” shouted Ian. Run were the only exit was down the stairs and that was being blocked by a madman with a pitchfork. There was only one direction to go and that was back into Neil’s room. Mary was sitting up in bed wearing an old nightdress the raised voices had woken her.

She looked at the window and said only one word, “Quickly.”

The boys knew what they had to do. Ian jumped out of the window. Neil turned to Mary, “Come with us.” He offered.

“I can’t, it would be pointless, go.” She had saved them, but why?

With a last look round he jumped out of the window, knocking the candle over as he did so. The dry straw on the floor instantly set alight. Mary sat in the bed and watched as the flames when higher, the wood frames bursting into flames in seconds.

The two young men picked themselves up and ran. As they passed the front of the tavern Ian noticed the sign above the door, The Crusader. As they ran down the footpath from behind them the voice of the landlord was unmistakable, he was closing in on them. “You two, come back, come back.” That was not the only sound drifting through the morning air, the sound of screaming too could be heard, two girls screams as they burnt to death.

The sun appeared over the horizon blinding Ian and Neil as they ran for dear life. The voice calling after them stopped the moment the sunrise came, as did the screams.

They didn’t look back or stop running until they reached the foreshore at North Ferriby. Both of them were partly dressed such was the manner of their escape. Ian bare his chest, Neil was shoe less, but both were now safe.

“We,” panted Ian, “We, never go back their again.”

“Agreed.”

“What was that screaming and why did the landlord give up the chase so suddenly?”

“I think there are some things we should never ask or talk about again Ian.”

In that moment a silent pact was made.

As the landlord came back into the bar of the Green Dragon he could see two empty glasses on the table, Ian and Neil had finished their drinks. The landlord was eager to show the two old gents the results of his findings, but business came first, “Two more pints gents?” both of them nodded agreement.

He brought the drinks over to the table before returning to the bar to collect his book. “This book is about all this area. If it’s not in here then no one knows.”

The two customers drank their pints as he looked through the volume. “Ah, here we are. ‘The Crusader’.”

The name sent a chill up Ian’s spine. That was the name of the pub, he had forgotten that. His face turned a ghostly shade of white, he felt sick. “That’s it.” he said in a low tone.

“I can’t see how.” Continued the landlord, “It says here that it burnt down. Over the years locals who have been out walking up in Scout Wood, that’s up at Melton Top on Mid Summers day morning have reported hearing the screams of the landlords daughters who were killed in the blaze.

“That’s it.” said Neil quietly, now his face also a pale shade. “Those two poor girls, died in a fire.” he remembered the screams they had heard running down that hill. “That’s where we stayed alright.”

“I doubt it.” said the landlord, “It burnt down in 1648, four hundred years ago.”

Silently Ian and Neil walked away from the public house. Each knew what the other was thinking, but remained silent.

They were lost in their memories, memories of those two girls they had spent their last night with.

Their quiet contemplation was broken by the landlord of the pub calling after them. They turned to see him holding Ian’s walking

stick in his hands. "I'd forget my head some days you know." Ian jokes. It lifted the melancholy atmosphere which had befallen the two men. As they turned the breeze, which had been blowing that day, dropped and all was still. Now the landlords' voice could be heard a little more clearly,
"You two, come back. You've forgotten your stick. Come back, come back"

FINI

Lost Luggage

The bright sun shone down on the East Coast main line station. Only the stationmaster pushing a trolley interrupted the piece and tranquillity of the warm summer afternoon.

Half a mile down the line the signal changed, the line was clear. In the distance a whistle blew and the unmistakable sound of a steam engine came into audible range.

Above the cutting that bent round to the right obscuring the sight of any oncoming traffic coming up the line. Plumes of smoke puffed high in to blue sky as though the smoke box was generating cloud formations. Then from around the bend in the track came a 0-6-0 Tank Engine pulling its train behind it.

It slowed as the engine approached the station the two yellow and brown coaches stopping precisely in alignment with the station platform.

Exhausting smoke and steam blew across the platform as the rear door of the second carriage opened. The guard stepped down onto the platform, "All change for Filey." he shouted.

Only one other door opened. The guard walked the length of one of the carriages to assist the only two passengers disembarking at that point.

A man in his late fifties was climbing down from the compartment. His suitcase causing him an amount of difficulty.

"Here, let me help you with that Sir." The guard took the case off of the passenger and places it on the platform, "Mind the step Sir."

The man stepped off of the train then turned to hold out a steadying arm for his wife who took hold of it before carefully stepping down herself.

Albert Parker slammed the door closed once his wife, Helen was clear.

"Thank you sir, your connection shouldn't be long." He said checking his pocket watch before touching the peak of his cap in an informal salute.

He returned to the rear of the train before blowing a sharp note on his whistle and waving the green flag he had held up to that

point under his arm. Mounting the train once again the engine got up steam and pulled out of the station, the steam and smoke slowly clearing as the carriages' rolled past.

"Good afternoon," said a voice.

Albert turned to see a young man coming out of the cloud of smoke.

He was smartly dressed in a brown suit, in his hand he carried a brief case. His hair was slicked back with cream and neatly trimmed around the back and side. Albert put his age at circa late twenties. How refreshing it was to see someone of that age smartly dressed. Most people of that generation these were dressing themselves like 1950's American teenagers or in the new psychedelic inspired fashions that were so popular in London. These days, this was the 60's he supposed things changed.

"Good afternoon" replied Albert.

"Good afternoon young man." As did Helen.

"Warm day," said the young man mopping his brow with a clean white perfectly folded handkerchief.

"Why don't you sit in the shade?" Albert said to his wife.

"Yes, it's hard work today." Helen seated herself on one of the long benches, which sat next to the station house. The building was a riot of colour, hanging baskets adorned the walls set at regular intervals.

"Are you on your holidays?" asked the young man.

"Er yes, yes we are." replied Albert, "Are you?"

"No such luck I'm afraid. I am on my way to a sales conference in Scarborough. Great isn't it, I'll be stuck inside all week missing out on the glorious weather."

"What line are you in?"

"Castings mainly, for steam locomotives."

"Really." Albert had worked man and boy in the railway industry and Helen knew that she wouldn't feature much in the ensuing conversation. Albert didn't only work on the railway but was passionate about the engines he worked on. She had lost him for the present, she would think though of the reason they were going to the small sea side town of Filey.

Nearly thirty years ago Helen and Albert were married in an old church in the village of Sutton-on-Hull. The reception in the church hall after the service was a simple affair. Ham salad followed by apple pie and custard were on the menu for the wedding breakfast guests.

The day after the newly weds were sat on a train bound for the town of Filey, their honeymoon destination.

The weather then had been similar to today's, warm and sunny. It had stayed like that the entire week. The long lazy days lasted a lifetime though the week past in a flash. The holiday was over too soon and the couple returned home and moved into their small terraced house.

One month later Helen found out after a trip to the Doctors that she was pregnant. It was going to be hard work with a child, times were hard, but the couple were overjoyed at the prospect.

Summer turned to autumn and Christmas loomed. Then tragedy struck the Parker household. Helen miscarried on Christmas Eve. She blamed herself, she had climbed on a chair to place the star on top of the Christmas Tree when the pain started.

They had had such big plans even the baby's name was decided. They were going to call him, or her after the place they had spent an idyllic week on honeymoon, Filey.

Every year now they would come back to the same place and stay in the same bed and breakfast. Every year they would take a period of time to remember their child, the child that never made it.

With each passing year the pain of the loss subsided, but the memory remained.

The sun was hot, she could do with a drink, "Albert." She said interrupting her husband who was deeply engrossed in his conversation talking at great lengths of valves, rods and pistons.

"...that way," continued the young man, "we can ensure that the grain in the metal runs truer. Any flaw in the piston grain then it is more likely to shatter with excessive use."

"Exactly my point, I've been saying that for years." Arthur said enthusiastically.

“Arthur.” repeated Helen.

“Oh sorry were you speaking dear?”

“Is there a buffet here? I could do with a cup of tea.”

“I’ll take a look. The Station Master must be about here somewhere.” Albert disappeared into the Station House.

“Here, allow me.” said the young man. As if from nowhere he took a flask and poured out two cups of tea. He passed the larger of the two plastic cups to Helen.

“Thank you young man.” She said before carefully sipping the hot brown liquid.

“It’s my pleasure.” He walked to the edge of the platform and looked down the line. “Shouldn’t be too long now, your train.”

“Oh I’m in no rush, this tea is lovely.” she said taking another sip.

“No I can’t see anybody around.” Albert said as he appeared from one of the two black doors in the Station House. “Oh, I see you’ve got a drink now.”

“The kind young man has shared his flask of tea with me.”

“Oh, that was very kind of him.”

The sound of the signal dropping turned their collective heads.

“There, I told you it wouldn’t be long.” smiled the salesman.

The train came around the bend.

“Here, let me.” The young man picked up the suitcase which still occupied the same piece of platform as had done for the past fifteen minutes.

The train pulled in. the guard, ever ready to help walked along the platform and opened the door for his passengers.

“Mind the step please.”

“Goodbye young man.” Helen said climbing into the compartment. “Thank you for the tea.

He handed the case to the guard who took it on board.

Albert boarded closing the door behind him. As the door slammed closed Albert slid the window down. “Thank you for a stimulating conversation young man.” He put his hand out of the window to shake hands with his new friend.

“Thank you,” he returned the compliment, “here my card.” From the breast pocket of his jacket he took a small white business card and handed it to Albert before shaking his hand.

The whistle blew and the train started to pull out. “Goodbye.” shouted Albert.

The salesman’s voice was lost voice was lost in the noise of the engine, to Albert though, he could swear he said...

“Did you here that?” he asked Helen.

“Did he say goodbye Mum and Dad?”

“That’s what I thought.” Albert lent out of the window to look back. As the smoke cleared he looked back at the platform, no one was there.

The station was empty.

He sat down on the chair looking at his wife.

“What is it Albert?”

“He’s gone.” He said with a quiet voice, so quietly Helen could hardly make out the words over the noise of the engine.

For a moment Albert sat in quiet contemplation. In his hand he could feel the small oblong of card. Slowly he turned it over and read the words printed on its face.

“What is it?” asked his wife.

He couldn’t say any thing, stunned into silence by the name on the card, ‘Filey Parker’

FINI

The Tomb of Lord Holderness

On a winters morning in 1789 the cold mist lifted off the site of the folly. The stone masons arrived on mass at first light ready to labour on their works until sundown. Huge vats of lime mortar were mixed by young boys whilst the chip, chip of the chisel on stone filled the morning air.

The noise woke his Lordship. He lay in a large four poster bed covered by various bed coverings and animal skins. He was not surprised to see that his wife, some thirty five years his junior was no longer lying beside him. He felt the mattress were she had laid, it was not even warm. He was sixty five years, his first wife died then he took one of her maids to fill his wife's place. The relationship hadn't come about after the death of his spouse, but had raged for at least one year before her death.

Rumour and speculation in the household was that his Lordship had probably done away with her leaving the way open for the young maid to find his bedchamber.

He got out of the bed wrapping himself in a blanket before walking over to the window and viewing the early morning scene.

Through the mist he could see the masons working on his mausoleum. He looked at them with a sense pride, all of them toiling for his final resting place. Wait, what was this, he could see one of the workers slacking. The man slacking from his work was standing by his piece of stone, smoking a pipe. He would be finished immediately with all loss of wages.

His attention was taken by something below his window. The sound of footsteps on the gravel could be heard directly below him, someone had just exited from the front door of the house. What had he been doing in the house? He had more then a good idea what this common trade person had been up too. He looked back over his shoulder at the empty bed, oh yes he knew all right.

On the site of the mausoleum one of the masons looked up from his work and saw George Mason coming up the hill from the direction of the house, home to the Holderness family. Edward shook his head as his son approached. Edward was the Master Mason, his son took more than a liberty with his father's trust.

"You'll end up on the end of a rope, my boy." He said as his son walked up the last stretch of the path, a large smile on his face.

"Don't worry yourself father, I have friends in high places."

"That's what I'm afraid of."

With a smile George picked up his shovel and continues to mix the mortar.

In the kitchen the young Lady Holderness drifted around the large table used for the preparation of food. She was deep in thought, thinking of the last twenty minutes mostly with the young muscular craftsman George.

To her it was poetic justice for his Lordship upstairs. They had come together after an affair, him cheating on her Mistress, so now she was doing it to him. She would meet George again later that day, he had promised to slip away again if he possible could.

The construction was slow on that folly of a tomb. His Lordship would not lay out the money for lifting equipment and tackle, so the artisans had to construct the memorial the old fashioned way, the unsafe way.

Already the job had cost the lives of three men raising many a complaint with Edward, but nothing had changed, no one dare approach his Lordship, not if they want to maintain their employment.

"His Lordship." Said a panic stricken voice as one of the men looked up to the figure approaching from the direction of the house.

Edward put down his trowel and prepared himself to meet his Master. Holding his cap in his hand and pointing his eyes to the floor Edward waited for his Lordship to speak. No words came, the Master was too busy looking around at the men busying

themselves. "Morning your Lordship." Edward offered the greeting while touching his forelock.

As Lady Holderness past through the great hall she noticed a scrap of paper on one of the hall tables. Looking round to ensure no voyeur was spying upon her she picked up the piece of paper and read its contents.

The print was crude and disassembled, she knew it was a message from George. There on the scrap of paper were two pictures, one of some kind of bucket or pot and the other a tree. Underneath the two etchings were twelve straight vertical lines. She understood the note perfectly, this was the only way of communication between the two lovers, it wasn't the safest way, but it was the only way.

"Good morning Edward, I see progress is coming on well."

"Er yes Sir, that it is."

"Two things Edward. I need one of your men to come and see me at the house at twelve noon, send your lad George down, he seems capable. "

"Right you are my Lord."

Lord Holderness turns on heels to head back towards the house, then stops and turns once again to face Edward. "One other thing."

"Yes Sir."

"That man over there, the one with the pipe."

"Arthur Sir?"

"Finish him, no wages."

"Yes Sir." Edward knew better then to ask why.

Finally Holderness turned and walked back to the house.

"Trouble Dad?" asked George.

"For you lad, for you."

At five minutes to midday an excited but cautious Lady Holderness came into the kitchen. The rendezvous was set, she was early, eager to repeat the morning's copulations.

Good, no one about, "This bodes well," she thought to herself. The note clasped in her left hand was clearly indicating the time and place for the assignation. He had no formal education, his trade was learnt from his father.

The picture of a pot and a tree indicated the location to be the old pantry and the time, twelve o'clock. Quietly she snook in and hid behind the door.

Through the small window she could see the large figure of her lover walking down the hill towards the house.

The noise of the pantry door slamming made her jump. Who had closed it? George was still on his way.

The sound of clicking came from the lock, someone had locked the door. Slowly and quietly she turned the doorknob. It was stuck. Frantically she rattled the door, but with no effect. The door was locked. Her lover would be here shortly and he would free her from the small room, which had become a cell.

Two minutes later George entered the front door of the house. As he touched his forehead his Lordship spoke in a business like tone, "Follow me."

The mason followed the Master into the kitchen, "That old doorway, brick it up." He said without any show of emotion in his voice. Did he know his wife was trapped in there? Of course he did, it was he who had left the note in the hall for her to find.

"Right you are my Lord." George was more than happy to oblige his Lordship. He was expecting a whipping at the very least. "Do you want me to take the door off Sir? It will make a neater job."

"No, no just brick it up."

In the room she heard the voice of George. He was here to save her. There was another voice, it was the voice of her husband. Her husband was there also. When he left George to his business then he would open the door to return her liberty no doubt.

For what she reckoned to be one hour she sat silently waiting. Noise was to be heard coming through the door. She could wait no longer, "George, George," she called.

The penultimate row of bricks were being laid when George heard the cries for help. He knew who it was and also where the appeals were coming from. Turning to his Lordship he saw the

stern look on his face, the hard expression he understood all too well.

He stopped work laying his trowel down on the top of the last course of bricks laid, an act of defiance to his Master.

“You will finish the work, or I’ll have you flogged to death.”

George was younger, bigger and stronger than Holderness, he could easily overpower him in a fight. Was she worth it?

No. There were plenty more like her. He finished the wall, he knew when he was well off.

On the inside of the cell Lady Holderness attacked the door with half a brick she had found on the floor in a dark corner. Sheer desperation spared her on.

Finally the handle came away, the lock broken.

She opened the door to see a wall standing in her way. The doorway to her freedom was gone. Crying she fell to her knees.

The sound of sobbing could be heard for three days after that, on the third day no more was heard.

Six months later the mausoleum was finished, the work complete. George himself had laid the last stone in place, a plaque with the inscription,

“Lord Holderness. A Fair and Honest Man.”

He now worked directly for his Lordship as head of his estate. Lord Holderness had rewarded his obedience with his purse. Did George feel any guilt for they had done six months previous?

The honest answer to that question was, no. The Lordship's wife had been one in a succession of women, no one mentioned her name now.

His latest girl was the daughter from his Master's first marriage. Ironically he had landed with both feet firmly on the ground when a noose around his neck was a more likely outcome.

The workers were paid off and thrown off of the estate with the Lord's usual grace. Once he had no more use for a man then he became a trespasser on his land.

His Lordship and his latest wife didn't sleep well that summer's night. The next day was the official dedication of the tomb, a celebration would be had.

Though it was a warm summer's night the bedroom was unusually cold, an icy cold wind blowing through the room.

The ceremony finished, many members of the family were now drifting back down the hill towards the house. George took his Lord and Master for a private tour around his memorial.

He had expected it too be cold in there after all it was made of stone. The temperature drop though was much greater then he had expected.

The faithful George showed him the two lines of plots for his ancestors to be buried in and at the end of the aisle stood the monument to him.

His Lordship was please with the work. He looked around high and low, nodding his approval. In his side he felt a sharp jab from his estate manager. How dare he touch his Master in such a fashion? He turned toward him and was about to let loose his wrath on the young man for striking his better when he saw the lads face. It was drained of all colour. Slowly looking round to face the monument to find the source of George's terror.

Standing on the bottom step was a woman. Who was she? How dare she enter this place? Then he stopped dead in his tracks, as he approached her he realised that the slightly translucent figure was the second Lady Holderness. It was the women the two men had bricked up six months previous.

The figure raised a translucent arm the hand pointing at the plaque. It had changed. It now read...

Lord Holderness

Murderer

George Mason

Betrayer

Both men overcome with fear they turned and ran towards the entrance. As they reached the arched doorway they were met not with the door but with a solid stone wall. The archway was still there, but the doorway had been replaced with a solid continues wall. No sign of the door was visible anymore. The ghostly figure smiled then faded away.

FINI

The Signalman's' Ghost

Albert Morrison had always had a passion for the railway. Both man and boy he'd spent many an afternoon watching the steam engines pass the end of his terraced street. All the walls of the houses were black with soot from the combined chimneys of the house fires and the passing engines.

From six in a morning to nine at night the clank of tank engines buffers ringing around the coal yard and streets of the huddled together houses were Albert lived.

The coal yard was the location of his employment. He was only a labourer, but loved being around the engines. Then on one cold morning in mid winter a loose sack of coal dislodged itself from a slow moving flat car. Albert tried to jump out of the way, the heavy sack landed on his right leg. The ankle was crushed, his employment terminated. Such accidents were not uncommon and the staff knew not expect anything from the company.

A week later he received a visit from his Uncle. They sat in the front kitchen, Albert's' leg raised in front of the fire. That visit brought him better news then he could ever had hoped for.

A friend of his Uncles was the Station Master a Brough railway station. A job as signalman was in the offing, the Station Master himself had lost a foot in the trenches of the Great War and on hearing of his friends nephews accident offered him the post immediately.

On Monday 2nd February 1933 Albert Morrison climbed the wooden steps to the Brough East signal box.

It was a dream come true for the young man just creeping into middle age. As he entered the first thing he laid eyes upon was the bank of signal levers along the right hand side. Above them the windows looked out onto the tracks running past. On the left hand wall as he entered, which was the back wall a large shelf protruded out and on it sat open a large book with a lamp shining down on it. The book was used to record all traffic passing over the level crossing. The click, click of a wall clock could be heard, this was situated on the wall above the shelf. At the East End of the box sat an old armchair and a table equipped with a

kettle, teapot and a couple of old well worn mugs. The kettle and teapot were also at least ten years old and well used.

The Station Master followed him in and over the next hour and a half informed him of his duties and the operations of the level crossing.

“So, do you think your up to it young man?” asked the old man.

“Oh yes Sir.” Replied Albert with an enthusiastic tone in his voice.

The box was cold. Several of the windows were open too stop the room becoming misted up with condensation, a fire would soon cure that.

The Station Master made a mug of tea for them both. He sat down on the chair and asked the if Albert had understood everything?

He had. After a lifetime of reading about, watching and talking to the men off the railway there wasn't much he didn't know.

One thing puzzled him, what had happened to his predecessor?

When asked the question the Station Master turned in the seat and paused a moment before answering. As he opened his mouth to speak the bell rang. His first traffic of the day was minutes away.

“Ah, here we go Albert. Show me what to do.”

“Right.” He said preparing himself. He looked at he bank of levers before him, after pulling the change lever he pulled the lever changing the west bound signal so it dropped leaving the green light showing. Then opening the door he ran down the wooden steps and closed the two gates blocking off the road, not that there was any traffic at his time of the day, or indeed at any time of day here. He returned to the box and waited to see what would come through.

Two and a half minutes later an A4 Pacific thundered past the box. The smoke blew high into the air as it shot through at high speed.

Once clear Albert went about reversing the process changed the signal then the changing lever and finally once again he went down the steps onto the road and opened the gates.

“Morning.” A passing pedestrian said to him as he went about his business.

“Good morning.” Replied Albert in good spirit. That was his first train through.

On the opposite side of the road a cinder footpath ran alongside the track up onto the east bound platform of the station. Albert could see a figure, all in black looking down the path toward him.

It was still early, the sun had not yet rose above the horizon. It was only out the corner of his eye that he caught the fleeting glimpse. He finished opening the gate, the latch snapping into its clip on the post. He looked again down the ally.

The figure was gone. It must have been a trick of the light, or the lack of it.

He closed the door behind him and took off his hat and coat hanging them up on the peg next to the door.

“Forgotten something?” asked the old Station Master quizzically.

“The log book. No, just about to do it.” he said picking up a pen and recording the time and direction of the train in the duty log.

“Well, I’ll let you get on. The 6.40 to Hull will be coming through shortly.” He put his mug of tea down and walked out of the box into the dark morning.

Albert finished his mug of tea, he was happier now than for as long as he could remember. The bell rang once again, “Here we go,” he said to himself. Five minutes later it was all over. A freight train came through at a low steady speed. The gates opened, signals changed and the log book was filled in.

Varying amounts of time elapsed between traffic coming through his crossing. It stood on the main line linking Hull and main East Coast line as well as the transpennine route linking east and west coasts.

By the time mid morning had come his heightened state of alert had waned somewhat. He knew that there was time sit and read or make a cup of tea in between his duties. He took a book out of his bag and sat down to read. It was a copy of ‘The Signalman’ by Charles Dickens bought for him by his Uncle when he had

been offered the job. He enjoyed ghost stories and this particular one seemed to be have written just for him.

As he read the spooky tale he heard the sound of heavy footsteps coming up the steps. He froze with fear, his mind was still in the book. The door swung open and in stepped a black faced figure, in fact he was black from head to foot. Albert after a sudden moment of shock breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that it was only the coal man covered from head to toe in coal dust.

"Now then." Said the black face, white lines protruding from the corners of his eyes and the creases in his face made by his large smile. "Coal." He said dropping a black sack on the floor.

"Morning." Said Albert in return.

"Cold day." the newcomer looking at the tea pot, "Any tea on the go?"

"Of course." Albert put his book down and poured two mugs of hot tea, he handed one too the coal man, "Here" he said passing one mug over.

"Oh God bless 'ya." He said wrapping his coal black hands around the hot cup, "You the new guy then?"

"First morning." He told him sitting back down in his chair.

"Lets hope 'ya last longer then the last pair they had in 'ere."

Albert remembered that the Station Master had avoided the question with regard to his predecessor earlier that morning.

"What happened to him, I asked the Station Master but he didn't say."

"Him, them more like." His white teeth shone through his blackened face. "It all started, oh I'd say about three or four months since, before Christmas any road."

He though back as he took another mouthful of tea. "It was like this. 'I'm on the day shift...' began the coal man perching himself on the edge of the table.

The bell rang.

"Excuse me" said Albert, duty called.

The low winter sun shone in Arthurs' eyes as he walked down the steps. He could see his breath in the cold air as he swung the gates closed. The sunlight wasn't strong, but bright enough to make him squint.

There he was again, that man on the footpath, all in black. He could see a little more clearly now, the figure was wearing a hat. The brim of it throwing a shadow onto his face. "I'll have to go." Said a voice from behind him. Albert turned quickly and with a start. Behind him stood the coal man standing one step up from him, "Thanks for the tea, did me the world of good that." Arthur wasn't listening, "Do you know he is?"

"Who?"

Arthur pointed towards the path, "*Him*"

"I don't know who 'ya mean." Said the bemused coal man.

"Him there, I see him every morn..." his words were cut short as he turned to look at the strange figure, but now no one was to be seen. The path was clear only the wind rushed down it. Again it had happened, yesterday though it had been in the hours of darkness and he had put it down to a trick of the light.

The coalman's steam driven van puffed off down the road toward the crossroads. Arthur returned to his box, once in it he peered down the path. He could see nothing.

The bell rang interrupting his thoughts, more traffic.

As he walked along the bank of levers his book fell to the floor after catching on his sleeve. He looked at it and thought of the story. The signalman in the story saw predictions of death and then ultimately his own demise. Was the strange figure a ghostly apparition? He read too many ghost stories.

The next morning was stormy as Arthur took over the charge of the signal box from his night shift contemporary.

"Goodnight" said George as he wrapped his collar up around his neck.

"Bye George." Said Arthur pouring a kettle full of hot water into the tea pot.

He took a sip of the hot drink and looked down the track. From behind him he heard the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs, "What's he forgotten?" he muttered to himself waiting for Georges' head to appear at the door.

Georges' head never appeared though, nor did anyone else. Arthur felt a sudden chill come over him. Slowly he crossed the

length of the box and looked out of the door. At the bottom of the stairs he could see a dark figure swinging a hammer down on what appeared to be one of the gates. He put down his mug and hurriedly put on his jacket and hat. On his way out of the door he picked up his lamp. It would be useful not only to light the way but could be used as a formidable weapon. On the stairs the rain whipped into his face, the wind was coming from the north and had an icy bite to it.

"You there" he shouted at the figure, but what figure no one was there. He stood looking at the empty road. Apart from the howling of the wind and the constant beating down of the rain all was quiet. The ringing of the bell brought him back to the present. After closing the gate he was glad to get back into the safety of the box.

One hour later he heard the sound of the footsteps coming up the stairs, with nowhere to run Arthur waited to see who it was. A wave of relief swept over him when he saw the face of the coalman appear at the door.

Minutes later he had his usual cup of tea and was warming himself by the fire.

"Tell me, is this station haunted?" Arthur asked him.

The coalman looked into his tea cup and nodded. Slowly he told Albert the story, "Yesterday you asked me what had happened to your predecessor."

"Yes."

"Well, he is the one that haunts this station."

"Heavens, why?"

"It turns out that, well let me start at the beginning." He sat himself on the edge of the table.

"Here sit down here." Arthur offered vacating his old red leather arm chair.

"Thank you" he sat down, making himself at home in the seat.

"The men that were stationed here before you now are both dead."

For a second in that signal box the silence was deafening.

"The dayshift man, David Morgan his name was. It turns out that he was sleeping with the wife of the nightshift signalman. He

knew that every night he would be here so no chance of getting caught by him with his wife. Somehow though the nightshift man, what was his name? Morris, Morris Pinder, that's him.

Anyway he found out. So just over a month ago Morgan clocked on at 5.30am as normal. Morris Pinder said his goodbyes before leaving for home. Morgan was none the wiser, he didn't know his secret had been discovered. Carrying on as normal he made himself a cup of tea and sat down to read the newspaper.

The bell rang, he put his paper down and changed the signal.

Outside he undid the latch that held the gate open.

Two wild eyes were watching him. His back was toward the man skulking behind one of the bushes that grew on the boundary between the road and railway property.

The figure of Morris Pinder slowly came out from the shadows carrying a hammer in his right hand. He rose it up above his head and brought it down on Morgans' head. The force throw him out onto the line, half conscious. Pinder followed him. Bending over the body he once again brought the hammer down on his head again and again cracking his skull. The hammer fell with vicious rapidity. The body lay on the ground, dead, but still the hammer rained down on him. The skull was holed and the soft pulp of the brain was exposed to the air. Pinder was a man possessed by hatred and jealousy. He didn't hear the frantic whistling of the engine speeding toward him.

At the last moment the hammer raised above his head ready to strike one last time, he looked up and saw the Pacific engine approaching. The whistle drowned out the scream as his body was thrown over the two bar fence that separated the rails from the foot path down to the station."

"Where did his body land?"

"About half a mile down the path."

That was were Arthur had just seen the dark figure standing.

"I never heard about it, it wasn't in the local newspaper."

"No, it was hushed up. The railway company told the Police that it was an accident."

That night Arthurs' dreams were filled with the images' of what must have happened that fateful morning. He did not sleep well and when he got to work the next morning he was adorned with dark rings around his eyes.

"Bad night?" asked George.

"Yes, couldn't sleep." He replied taking off his coat. As Arthur sat in his chair drinking tea, his mind was still thinking of the murder there only weeks before.

Still the coal man was coming early today, that was always something to look forward too, he would have the kettle on ready for him.

The bell rang. The first mornings arrivals was on its way, so began another day.

He changed the signal and put on his hat and coat. On leaving the box he dared to look up the path to the Station. No one was there. He felt more then relieved.

Bending down to unhook the latch a dark figure came up behind him and brought a hammer down on the back of his head. Arthurs' body lurched forward onto the track. The hammer came down several times pummelling his head.

The coal mans steam lorry was coming down the road, from in his cab he could see a strange occurrence at the level crossing. Something struck him as being wrong, he open the regulator valve and hurried to the scene of the crime.

As he pulled up a coal train thundered through.

This time no body was thrown off the track. The brakes of the engine squealed in the darkness as the driver shut off steam. The coal man looked at the sliced up body on the track, he felt sick, and then was sick by the side of the road.

For half an hour he stayed there staring at the disassembled body. The driver of the train arrived, out of breath he had run back down the line.

"I didn't stand a chance. I only saw him at last minute." He wheezed.

"Him, what did you see?" asked the coal man without taking his eyes off of the body.

"Just him lying on the track, where's the signal man?"

“He’s the signal man.” An uneasy pause ensued. “You didn’t see anyone else?”

“No just him.”

For the first time he looked up from the track. Why he didn’t know, but something made him look down toward the station.

Half way along the cinder track he could see a dark figure watching him.

FINI

The Undiscovered Country

The morning started like any other, breakfast while reading the paper, the train to work and the purchase of a bacon sandwich at the station buffet. The indulgence of the sandwich would not please his wife. Eating such an unhealthy snack wouldn't do his heart condition any good at all. He enjoyed his sandwich though, that really was his only pleasure in life other than a glass of wine at the weekend.

His weekends were structured now his children had abandoned the family home. Shopping on a Saturday, church on a Sunday. The shopping he didn't enjoy, but that was when he chose his bottle of wine, the highlight of the trip. The pilgrimage to the church was, well not meant to be enjoyed, but still he and his wife would attend every Sunday. The two children didn't accompany them anymore. They had long since strayed from the road of religious instruction. It was not totally unexpected. He himself had rebelled in his late teenage years. The excesses of the late '60's consumed him. Jimi Hendrix, Cream, free love and pot had enticed him during his years at university and would look back on that time with disgust publicly. In his private thoughts though he remembered them with great regard.

It wasn't until his late twenties that he had fallen back under the reassuring umbrella of the church. He married another one of the congregation and now both attended every Sunday.

Now sitting at his desk in the accountants office where he was employed he stared at his computer screen unable to concentrate, distraction was all around him. The young twenty something girls that would walk past with their short skirts and open top blouses were a constant distraction. On more than one occasion he would throw more than a glance at them as they wiggled past. After all he was only human.

The young girls would look upon this fifty year old as a father figure and yes, he could still be deemed attractive for a man of his age, not Sean Connery or John Thaw, but still the best of a bad bunch of older men in the office. He enjoyed their company,

it did his ego the world of good to be seen by the other members of the department conversing with them.

Later that very afternoon the sun shone through the south facing windows of the office.

He felt hot and had started to sweat. Frantically he undid the top button of his shirt and yanked down his tie. Then he wasn't aware of the sweat running down his body, a pain had taken his attention, a shooting pain that ran up his right arm into his chest. Violently he lurched forward knocking his terminal off of his desk. Everyone within a twelve foot radius looked up from their work to find out where the uncommon noise had emanated.

The top half of his torso lay flat on his desk then sprang backwards against his chair. The feeling of panic and helplessness over came him. He knew all too well that it was a heart attack. Getting to his feet he took one last look around, looking for help, before collapsing on the floor. He dropped like a sack of coal and hit the floor with a heavy thud.

He knew what had happened, his vision was gone, but still he was partly conscious. He heard someone say, "Quick get an ambulance." After that the voices merged into one great echo.

The light his eyes could see was fading now, was this death?

He'd lived a good life all in all. His charity works had raised thousands of pounds, the times volunteered to good causes was incalculable. He was happy with what he had done in life.

Darkness fell.

Wait voices, movement. He was in an ambulance, there was still hope for him. The rocking motion of the vehicle was sending him back off, no he had to fight it, stay awake.

"Don't worry," said a voice, "You'll be at the hospital in a few minutes, they'll take good care of you." It was a paramedic who was speaking to him. He was alive. Now with this piece of good news he allowed himself to slip back into his sleep.

Once again the darkness slipped away. This time he was in an operating theatre. The doctors had inserted tubes up his nose and in his mouth, cables were sticking to his chest and temples. At least a dozen people must have been in the room he calculated from what he could see.

He could see a large light above him and at least two cabinets containing all manner of equipment. Then it struck him, how could he see so much?

The view of the events was not one from the perspective of him lying on the operating table, but of watching the proceedings from a position up in the ceiling. He was looking down at himself on the table.

Three of the nurses caught his eye, they were like angels. The men who seemed to be in charge took two paddles off a machine. He didn't have a clue what it was , but he did know what its purpose was. The machine was for shocking the heart back into a rhythm.

Again he asked the question of himself, was he dead?

A cold wind blew from behind him, he turned to see where it came from, what he saw answered his question, that was it he must be dead.

A tunnel of light stretched out before him, twisting and turning with a bright light source at the other end. He looked back toward the operating theatre and saw his body convulsing on the table with each passing shock.

Let it go, he said to himself. As he thought the words he felt himself being projected along the tunnel. The light source became brighter, the living world smaller as he past through to the other side.

He had never had such a feeling of calm. He was floating, no standing in, what was it? were was it? all that could be seen all around was light. Did it reach to infinity or was it a mist that shrouded something else. Holding out a hand in front of his face to judge distance, it was perfectly visible. Turning back the tunnel had gone. He didn't feel any fear, the opposite in fact, unrealisable joy.

In front of him a figure appeared, floating in mid air. It was a man, was it? yes it was a man. Strangely he couldn't put any other descriptive form to the figure.. it was a man dressed in white. What colour hair he had, he could not tell, what his nose was like or eye colour, all were a mystery to him.

“Welcome” said the figure, “you have been expected.” He said with a quiet calming voice. “You have many questions?”

“Who are you?” he asked the visitation.

“I am who you think I am.”

He said nothing, but he did hope to himself.

“They are all here.”

“Who?”

“Your family. Mother, Carol, Father, Paul and your little Uncle.”

“Uncle?”

“Billy.”

How did he know of that?

“You were the only one who called him Billy were you not, he is here.”

This must be paradise, he thought, no one knew he called his Uncle William ‘Little Billy’ not even him.

Joy overwhelmed him. Then he felt a stab in his chest, “What was...”

“...That?” said the figure finishing the sentence off for him.

“Your time has not yet come to join us. Your going back to spread the word.”

Did he want to go back?

“Is there anything you want to ask me, quickly while you have a chance.”

“When am I coming back?”

“Soon, soon.”

The vision slowly faded from view. The light all around him also began to wane. The pains in his chest were becoming unbearable now, ripping through him wave after wave.

He sat bolt upright on the operating table as the paddles were lifted off from his chest for the last time. He was breathing heavily, the doctors had to restrain him and force his body back down onto the table.

He felt as happy as he ever had, it took the assembled personnel of the operating theatre from stopping him jumping off the table and dancing around the room.

His mood has abated somewhat as he lay in a hospital bed, ward eleven. It was two days after the wondrous events he had experienced, though told to rest he occupied his time writing up his experiences so to never forget them. Forget, how could he ever do that.

The rest of the ward wished he would, as any new arrival came into the ward he would tell them the story in a more than excessively loud voice.

Several visitors called on him during his stay, his wife, children, friends, colleagues and the Reverend Collins from his local church. Each heard the story.

At the end of the second days recuperation the doctor who had brought him back from the dead paid him a visit. The conversation had only lasted minutes when he lurched into the story of his journey back from the other side.

The doctor listened with interest as he told his tale, he had heard such stories in his time at this and others hospitals. "Tell me," asked the medical man, "did you see anything on top of the two cabinets when you were floating in the room?"

"You don't believe me do you?" he said with a calm forgiving voice, "I know what happened to me, I saw the face of..."

"I ask," interrupted the doctor, "because we are trying to prove that cases such as yours are valid and not just one part of the brain telling another part that the body is on the threshold of death. That is what you're supposed to experience on passing to the other side, next life, heaven etc."

"I can assure you it was real enough." He was not to be moved on the point.

"What convinced you that what happened was a real experience?"

"He knew that I called my Uncle William, Billy. No one knew that, not even him."

"From what I hear you were given the chance to ask this vision a question?"

"That is correct."

"And did you?" the doctor asked full of hope.

“No, I didn’t think there was any need too. He had proved himself in as far as he knew what I called my uncle.”

“But, that information was already contained in your brain, he told you nothing you didn’t already know. That cannot be proof of anything. Why didn’t you ask one of the big questions like, ‘What is the meaning of life?’ or ‘How did he create the universe?’”

“That was unnecessary in my opinion and completely disrespectful, after all he had shown me so much.”

“You had the chance to ask God why we were here, but you didn’t. Oh well, no doubt we will all find out one day.”

“Doctor Hanson, what on earth do you think your doing disturbing my patient?” a large framed West Indian nurse was stampeding down the ward. The doctor in dread of his life stud up to leave,

“My question, did you see anything on top of the cabinet? A picture perhaps?”

“I do believe their was a picture, yes.”

“Of?” asked the young doctor quickly.

“A landscape I think, yes a landscape with a lot of colour. A country scene I think, it was a bit blurred.”

“Thank you,” he said leaving before the large nurse could get within reach of him, “You look after your self.”

The Sunday morning after his release from hospital he proudly stood in the pulpit of his church and told the assembled congregation of his experience.

They listened in awe at the things he had to say. Not all believed him when he said that he had met God, but most did.

How he had come to the conclusion that it was the almighty he had conversed with didn’t matter to him, it added to the story, ‘I met someone in Heaven’ sounded much more grand as ‘I met God.’

He was enjoying his fifteen minutes of fame his story had brought him, a book was even talked about. Three weeks later

while walking down the stairs one morning he felt the familiar pains in his chest.

His wife found him at the bottom of the stairs and immediately phoned for an ambulance.

He could feel the bumping of the trolley as it clattered through the hospital corridors. He was at peace with himself, if he died Heaven was waiting, if not he still had work to do.

His body lay once more on the operating table. In his eyes darkness had faded, this was as it had happened only weeks before, his vision returned. As before he was looking down at his own dying body on the operating table. He watched at his body convulsed with the electricity causing through it.

The voice of the same doctor who had treated him before spoke to his staff, "Once more."

The bolt of electric current discharged, the line on the heart monitor remained flat.

From his vantage point high in the ceiling he saw the demise of his body. That was it this time, so he waited patiently for the cool breeze to signal the arrival of the tunnel of light to appear once more. This time he would find out what the meaning of the universe was.

As he waited, he saw the picture that the doctor had asked him about.

It was a black and white picture of, Mickey Mouse.

FINI

The Saint Stevens Day Hunt

Lord Harnett, Master of the Hunt looked out of the first floor window. In the courtyard below the hunt members assembled themselves ready for the mornings ride. An air of anticipation filled the air as the riders and stabler's chatted about the days proceedings. The sound of horses hooves clattering on the cobbles paired with the barking of dogs drowned out most of the conversation.

The Master checked his appearance in the full length mirror, his dress was immaculate, the scarlet jacket and cream riding britches were pressed with military precision. The riding boots that fitted so well around his feet and calf's shone so much he could almost see his own reflection.

A knock came from the door, "Come." He said in a commanding tone.

A young lad entered, no more then fourteen years old. He was dressed very much like his Lordship, only a miniature version. In his hand he carried a silver tray, on it sat a glass of sherry.

"I thought you may like a glass of something Sir?" he said in his quiet innocent voice.

"Why, young man," retorted his Lordship, a genuine warmth in his voice, "thank you very much." He took the glass from the tray and held it up to his lips. "Sit down young man."

The lad sat on a stool in front of a dressing table, "And who do we have here?"

"Edward Bennett, Sir."

"Bennett?" the Master recognised the name, but were from.

"The Crown, Sir. My fathers the landlord."

"Of course." Smiled the old man, "Harold's young son. The last time I saw you, you were in short trousers." He tossed the sherry back in one movement.

As he put the glass down on the dressing table he felt a cold draught on the back of his neck. Although it was the twenty sixth of December the weather was unusually mild for this time of year. So, were had it come from? He finally put it down to the

glass of sherry he had just consumed. "Is this your first hunt young man?"

"Yes Sir." Said the lad, "I've been riding all year now, practising for today.

"Good lad." He replied sitting down on the long stool next to the teenager. He looked into the middle distance and reminisced about days gone by, "I still remember my own first hunt, "he said with a nostalgic air in his voice, "it was all different in those days. If I remember right I spent more time on the ground than on my horse. I'll never forget it though. The dogs bagged a fox, it was a good kill."

"Did you get blooded?"

"Oh yes, my father did it."

"Will I today?"

"Let's get one first. Then I will do it myself." Again a shiver ran down his spine. "It was all different in those days. Now the hunt is plagued by these working class protesters, all of them from the towns and the cities, not a clue about our traditional and ways, damn do-gooders. In the old days none of them would dare stand in the way of the Masters horse. Anyone who did would be whipped."

"Really?" asked Edward, a hint of excitement in his voice.

"Now, hunting itself as a sport is in danger, the government now are trying to abolish us, damn labour classes. The vote should never have been given to the common man.

On the wall hung a huge mirror. From across the room the Master looked at his own melancholy face. Then he saw something behind him. It was a fleeting glimpse, but a figure was stood behind him. He spun round to challenge the newcomer, but no one was there. Strange, he could have sworn a woman was...

A trick of the morning light, it must have been.

"This hunt," he continued, "had its roots in the middle ages and has had a bloody history down the ages. It started out as a hunt for convicted criminals. The Lord would give any convicted man a fighting chance, this only happened on mid summers day and Saint Stevens Day. The choice was theirs, the block or the

hunt. The block was a quicker death, but the hunt gave them a fighting chance.

Later in the seventeenth century it became a more of a race between man, dog and horse. Man against beast.

So there you are young man, today when you ride out you will be riding into history, and," he said with a smile on his face, "you might even hit the odd protester, what."

This time man and boy laughed. His Lordship liked this boy, they seemed to be on the same wavelength. The laughter died away, "A protester was killed once here. It was back in the late eighteen hundreds. By all accounts she was a strange women, lived up on the Wold's in a shake..."

It was a cold winter morning in 1895. The hunt was planned for later that day. Among the coming and going of the stable lads the Lord of the Manor took a stroll around the courtyard. The horses were been exercised, the hounds fed and in the tap room leather and brasses were being polished to within an inch of its life.

The Master was happy with the work being carried out by his staff, so he returned to the house for breakfast.

After the sizeable meal he allowed the newspaper to captivate his time for the next half an hour. This was interrupted by the butler knocking on the dinning room door.

"What is it Hargreaves?" asked the thick set florid faced Master.

"The gamekeeper begs your pardon sir. He would value a moment of your time sir." Hargreaves was of the old school, almost pre-Victorian, steady as a rock and discrete as a spy.

"I'll be out presently." He replied not looking up from his copy of The Times.

"Very good Sir." As silently as he had entered he left the room.

Lord Harnett squinted as he left the confines of the house and out into the courtyard.

There next to the door stood Prescott, the game keeper, cap in hand waiting his lordships pleasure.

"Ah, Prescott. You wanted to see me>"

"Yes, my Lord." He said twisting his cap between both hands.

“Well out with it then, busy day you know.”

“It’s the Molly woman Sir, she’s been seen.” The game keeper appeared to be on edge.

“And?”

“Well, Sir...”

“You people from the village are all so superstitious.” He said, “Come on show me where.”

Molly was a mysterious woman who lived in the woods high up on Brantingham Dale. No one knew who she was or where she had come from. Several attempts had been made to run her off of the land, but every time a group of foresters had been sent into the wood to find her she would disappear. The air of mystery surrounding her intensified on every failed attempt to rid her from the property.

In the local Inn the foresters would tell their tales of how she had vanished into the tree’s each tale embellished each time it was told. Some said she could talk to the animals, if she had lived two hundred years earlier she would have been burned as a witch. Were the animals her familiar spirits warning here of the oncoming rabble? Others said she was a tree spirit or forest elf. No one was entirely sure.

Prescott had taken his Lordship to the main gate of the estate. The gate stood on the only track into the grounds of the house, for a mile out after the gate the wood clung to both sides of the road. “She was there Sir.” He said pointing into the trees to the right of the stone pillar which one of the gates swung on.

“What was she doing?”

“Just looking Sir. Prescott now felt a little bit of a fool. Maybe it had been somewhat of a knee jerk reaction bringing his Lordship out to the gate. He felt the expression of disapproval on his Lordships face burn into the back of his head. He turned to face his Master, “Sorry Sir.”

“Carry on.” He said turning and walking away back toward the house.

On returning to the courtyard much activity met him. Most of the horses were out of the stables and being walked around. The dogs were unusually frisky, all barking as though they had been

excited by something. This pleased his Lordship, the hounds would be on good form today. His own horse, Pegasus was the finest for miles around, on every hunt it led the way. The head stable boy should be seeing to him now, he would pay him a visit, make sure everything was in order.

The moment he entered the stable he knew something was wrong, the horse seemed disturbed by something, the fire in its eyes had gone. As his Lordship arrived at the gate he saw a figure bending down at the rear right leg of Pegasus. "You boy, what do you think you're doing there?"

The figure remained in the crouching position, still and silent.

"You boy," he repeated in a loader sterner tone, "I'm talking to you."

The hooded figure slowly rose and then turned. To the Masters surprise the figure wasn't the stable boy, but that of a middle aged women, her face haggard and worn. She looked considerably older then her years. In her hand she held a short bladed knife, blood smeared on the blade. On the cobbled floor of the stable a small pool of blood gathered by the horses hoof.

"What the hells going on here?" shouted his Lordship. His voice so loud everyone in the courtyard stopped their work and looked toward the stable, none dare investigate the cry.

"You kill animals." Said the women, disdain in her voice. "they do you no harm. Without them the woods will become unbalanced, your destroying the woods natural cycle."

Mad, she's mad. He thought to himself.

"So I'm going to stop you, you can't hunt without a horse."

"Do you have any idea how much the animal is worth?" he blurted out, "if you've done him any harm I'll kill you."

With a brisk act of defiance the women pointed the knife at the master. A clear threat to him in his opinion.

"You insolent peasant." Grabbing a long hook off of the wall he swung it round in a circular motion over his head before bringing it down toward her. The curved hook embedded itself in her throat, blood shot out of the wound both were it had entered and the exit wound opposite.

The women fell to the floor. A pool of blood forming around her lifeless body.

Prescott was the first person to come into the stable on hearing the scream. On sight of the body he froze. His eyes bulged in their sockets and his jaw fell open.

"Any idea who she is?" asked the Master without a hint of emotion in his voice.

"Sir, that's Molly, the woods woman."

"Good, get rid of it."

"Sir?"

"Get rid of it, now" he bellowed.

"Where, Sir?" his mind wasn't thinking straight after the shock of seeing the grotesque image on the floor.

"Come on man, pull yourself together."

"Yes Sir. The new cesspit, we've just dug a new cesspit."

"Perfect, get on with it man, good riddance to her."

"Wow." Said Edward after listening to the story, "Is that true?"

"As far as I know," he told the boy, "the stories been past down the family for generations so who knows how accurate it is to the what actually happened."

Now run along and make yourself ready."

Edward left the room, a smile on his and a heart full of anticipation.

Ten minutes later he was ready. Checking his reflection one last time he made towards the door.

In the hallway he was met by one of the stable staff, "Yes Carl, what can I do for you in this fine morning?"

"Morning Sir. The usual group of protesters are massing at the gate Sir. Do you want me to take any action?"

a sinister side of Lord Harnett became prevalent, his face hardened and his teeth ground together. "Do we have any spare dogs?"

"Dogs, yes Sir, about a dozen." No, he wasn't going to, he wouldn't.

"Then set the dogs on them." He said grinding his teeth.

Carl didn't move, had he heard the Master correctly?

“Well what are you waiting for man.”

“Sir.” Answered Carl scuttling off down the hallway.

Holding his head up high his Lordship walked out into the daylight ready for the days hunting.

The days activities went well, no protesters plagued the hunt and the hounds chased and caught three foxes. An excellent days work by all concerned.

Young Edward Bennett was blooded by his Lordship himself much to his delight. Throughout the hunt though the young boy couldn't help but think of the murder there all those years before. The image in his mind was brought to life when he saw a hooded women in the woods watching the passing horses.

Later that day dusk was falling. The hunt ball was now in full swing in the great hall. His Lordship felt a little hot in the house so decided to work off the five course meal he had just enjoyed with a walk in the cold bracing December air.

He found himself in the courtyard, now hosed and cleaned down after the aftermath of the hunt. The acoustics of the courtyard could play tricks on the ears with its echoing stone walls. He swore that he could hear someone talking. No one was around, it must have been a voice from the house. Standing looking into the sky he could see to the stars now becoming visible in the east while to the west the last throws of sunlight coloured the sky above the horizon.

There was that voice again, behind him this time. He turned, no one was there. If someone was having a practical joke with him there was only one place they could have slipped out of view, the main stable block.

Slowly he crept in.

It was almost pitch black in the stable, the only light came in through the windows. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the lack of light. In each stable bay the horses stood silent and still, not a shake of a main or tale or nod of a head from any of them. That was strange in its self. He felt a chill in the air and shivered.

There they were. The practical joker was standing in a shadow in the darkest part of the stable. “You there, show yourself.”

Silence was the only reply. He took a step closer to the figure, then something made him stop. A strong suspicion came over him that this person was not one of his invited dinner guests. He stretched out his left hand and took the first thing he could off the wall. a long handled hook. If this was a thief then he wouldn't be getting out without a fight. "Show yourself." He ordered again.

The figure in the shadows took a step forward into the partial light of the window.

It was a women. Her hood obscured her face from view.

"What are you doing in here? This is private property." Abruptly asked the Master.

As she lifted her head the light shone on her disfigured face. A face that was black with old blood stains and he saw a hole in the front of her neck.

Fear struck Lord Harnett. Something was behind him also, he could feel its breath on the back of his neck.

In sheer panic he swung the long handled hook at the figure standing in front of him. It hit her in the head. He felt no resistance on the swing. It had passed straight through her. The momentum swung him round through a hundred and eighty degrees, behind him silently sat the pack of hunting hounds watching him patiently.

He turned back to the women. She slowly lifted her arm and pointed a finger at Lord Harnett. The dogs stood to attention then attacked him.

Once dead the hounds returned to the kennels in silence while Molly returned to the trees.

There were no more hunts on that estate, no more protesters, no more deaths, no more need for justice to be handed out.

FINI

A note from the Author:

A good friend of mine asked if I had any ideas for a ghost story set in the London Underground.

For many years sightings have occurred in the labyrinth of tunnels that stretch out beneath the streets of the capital.

Due to the different levels of building and rebuilding such as after the great fire of 1666, London is purported to have many levels of ghosts. Many of the Victorian engineers that slaved on the sewer and rail networks are said still to walk the places of their death.

These two stories are just two of the many that are told.

N.

Terminal

The droning planes of the Luftwaffe flew in formation over the bomb damaged streets of London. For a period in 1940 the German aircraft bombed London not only during the hours of darkness, but also in daylight.

The sound of air raid sirens were the most common sound on the streets of the capital for a period of one month. On this Thursday the disjointed continuity of the city's life continued as normal as one may expect.

Alison Maple picked her way through the rubble on her way to work, she was an assistant in the department store Fortnum and Mason. The sun was shining in the sky, but was obscured by the rising smoke from the smouldering fires from the half ruined city. Though the carnage lay all around she was happy to be out in the sunshine, hazy as it was. Much of her recent life had been spent in air raid shelters at her work or with the two other generations of her family huddled together at home. Not all the family were there, the two male members of the family, her brother and father were away somewhere in the world fighting for freedom. None of them knew where exactly, the letters never said. Brother Harry was away in Africa and father, Ernest was in Europe somewhere.

Her moment of happiness was again disturbed as the familiar sound of the air raid klaxon.

Looking up into the sky that all too familiar formation of German aircraft was overhead.

Looking round for salvation she made straight toward the nearest bolthole, Bank Underground station.

"Quickly." Said the warden on the gate as he ushered her in before slamming the door closed behind him.

Deep down in the bowels of the network of tunnels she came out onto the platform. The usual sight was of many sleeping bags placed end to end along the length of the platform. Today though a different sight met her eyes.

The Londoners down here today were all awake, after all it was the daytime. Many stood chatting to one another, others remained seated indulging themselves in idle gossip.

As far as she could see it was mainly the men who stood, smoking and discussing the war, not that there were many men down there. The males that were there all wore suits, she assumed they must be some sort of official persons exempt from the call to arms.

The Underground system didn't operate during air raids so many people sat on the edge of the platform, legs dangling down towards the track.

Alison sat at the very end of the platform, next to her sat a young man around the same age as herself. He was dressed in a suit and carried with him an old brief case and of course his gas mask.

As Alison sat down he passes her a polite glance, but didn't engage in any form of conversation.

"Sorry," offered Alison as she sat down nudging him with her elbow as she did so.

"It's ok, I've had worse." He replied, his voice was kindly.

Once settled she looked around the densely populated station. All forms of expression could be seen in that short tunnel. Happiness, sorrow, despair, all could be seen on the faces of the people in that room. The face of the young man sitting next to her showed sorrow, almost abject despair.

"I'm Alison by the way." She said trying to spark a conversation into life, maybe she could cheer him up.

"David." He replied.

"Do you work here, in the city?" the question was innocent enough.

"Yes, the clothes you mean?"

"Clothes?" she couldn't tell what job he did by his clothes.

"Not in uniform, that's what you mean isn't it. Well it's not my fault." His voice almost broke.

"No, no," Alison has hit a nerve in him, "I didn't mean anything like that, really."

"I get used to it where ever I go. Women looking at me in the street, pointing and whispering.

"No, it's none of my business." Alison tried to reassure him that she had meant by the comment.

"I suppose your husband is away fighting and you want to know why I'm not with him?"

"I'm not even married."

A pause fell on the conversation. Alison thought to reengage the intercourse, but decided against it, the conversation was over.

Then all of a sudden he spoke again, this time in a steadier voice, "I have a horse shoe kidney." He said in a quiet tone before turning to face her.

"Sorry?" had she heard correctly?

"Most people have two, kidneys. I only have one. Because of that I couldn't join up. Apparently you need two kidneys to kill Germans." He was full of self pity for himself.

"Oh I see." Said Alison. She felt sorry for him. Did she wonder though, was he that disappointed not to be going to fight.

"I'm doing my bit for the War effort." He continued, in a happier tone, "working at the War Ministry.

"Oh yes, that sounds exciting. Alison tried to encourage his happier disposition, "What do you do there?"

"Just a clerk, more of a runner actually." He was once again spiralling into depression.

"The smallest cogs keep the biggest machines running."

"That's true." He smiled.

A huge muffled bang came directly from above them. A bomb had landed nearby. The lights flickered and dust accompanied by bits of tile fell from the curved ceiling of the tunnel.

All the conversations on the platform simultaneously stopped, everyone looked upward. They all knew that was close, how many direct hits could a building take? In the eerie silence the sound of bombs could be heard exploding on the surface of the city.

Slowly the talking started again.

"When will it stop?" asked Alison.

“Soon,” he replied, “soon. We are working on system called RAD...” he stopped himself. “Sorry can’t say.”

“I understand. Official secrets and all that.”

“Walls have ears, you know.”

Once again the conversation fell into an uneasy silence.

“You said you weren’t married.” He asked tentatively.

“No, no I’m not. Who’d have me?”

“Anyone I would think, I’d jump at the chance of...” all of a sudden he became self conscious, blushing his sentence faded. Much to Alison’s disappointment.

She attempted to recapture the moment, “Really, would you?”

“Er, yes, I, well, I, suppose I would yes.” His speech stumbled out, a nervous edge in his voice.

A break through had been made, he had never come to this point with a woman before, he was at that point, did he go in for the kill as it were or would he back away?

Alison waited with eager anticipation for the question, the answer she knew would be yes.

It never came.

“These days things are, difficult, aren’t they?”

the station once again rocked with another aerial bombardment as she spoke.

“Yes it’s hard, you see its...”

“Yes?” she wanted to know more about him.

“My family were killed in the blitz four nights ago. The house was flattened, they didn’t have time to make it to the shelter so they sat under the stairs. It took a direct hit, nothing was left.”

Alison could say nothing to him, she had up to now been spared any personal tragedy. She placed her hand on his and her head on his shoulder, this poor man had lost everything.

“Theirs nothing left for me now, no family, no home, nothing.”

What could she do, what could she say? Alison felt completely helpless.

“Sometimes I think that I’m not long for this world. I would have been there, but I got stuck in Westminster Station during the raid. I feel as though I’m dead already.”

Not another word was said until the all clear sounded twenty minutes later.

As the orderly evacuation of the station took place Alison and the young man remained seated next to one another. As the warden ushered the last of the people out he saw the two sitting together.

“Come on you two, back to work.”

As they stood the young man handed Alison his business card. John Gilbert was his name. “Can I see you after work tonight?” he asked.

“Yes, of course.” Alison said with a smile. She lead the way up the stairs toward the daylight. On exiting the station she almost choked on a cloud of smoke and brick dust. Putting her head down she ran throw the grey cloud.

“Get out of there luv., you might get killed.” said a strangers voice. she felt a hand grab her arm and pull her to one side. She turned to see the entrance to the station flattened, only the arched doorway remained.

A sense of shock came over her, “but, but” she spluttered.

“Calm down” said the voice.

“John, where’s John?”

“Who, theirs no one there.”

Her eyes focused on the source of the voice. it was one of London’s firemen. She looked around once more for John. He was nowhere to be seen.

“John, he’s in there.” She told the fireman, panic filled her voice as she pointed toward the pile of bricks that stood where the station had been.

“If he was in there when that bomb hit it then he’s dead.”

“But, the all clear has just sounded.” What was this man talking about. She had just come out of the station and no bomb had just hit it.

“Here it’s in ‘The Sketch’. The fireman took a copy of the newspaper out of his pocket and handed it to Alison. “Oy you.” He shouted at someone on the other side of the street before running off toward them.

Alison stood in the middle of the road. Rubble lay all around her. Fires ragged were gas supplies were breached and walls collapsed and the ruined buildings, she saw none of it.

On the front cover of *The Sketch* she read the story of how Bank Station suffered a direct hit in the latest round of bombings. The gates at the entrance to the tube station had been either left open or blown off by another blast. By a thousand to one chance another falling bomb had deflected off of a building and shot straight down into the deep underground tunnels. The station collapsed in on itself, killing everyone sheltering in the building. If these events were in today's press then it must have happened yesterday? This was surely impossible, she had just been...

Alison grabbed a pacing Policeman, "Is the station reopen yet?" she asked in a daze.

"No," he said, "I don't think it will ever reopen, it's completely entombed itself." With no reply from the young woman he started to continue on his way.

Alison grabbed his sleeve, "When?" she asked with tears in her eyes.

"During the daylight raid, yesterday." He said as he walked off down the street.

FINI

Death at Blackfriars

Three middle aged men stood on the platform of Blackfriars Underground station. No daylight ever found its way down here to the sub terranean world. While the city above sparkled with the many colourful light of advertising boards, theatre and shop fronts the underground chambers dug out of clay under the capitol remained a constant twilight.

At this precise time the watches on the wrists of the three men where synchronised at 2.01am. an eerie silence had fallen on the tunnels of the Underground system, all trains had stopped running for the night.

The three out of hours visitors to the station that night were not passengers or maintenance engineers, no they were something quite different. These three were physic investigators, ghost hunters.

They had come to the right place. This particular station had a long history of paranormal activity. A theatre had once stood on this site, the principle actor, John Hampton had been murdered in the cellars by a jealous understudy who envied his talent. Hampton is now said to walk that very platform they now stood on. Hampton's murderer, only known as Edwards had also come to the end of his life in that theatre, falling from the balcony, had he been pushed by the ghostly Hampton. No one knew for sure, but his screams were often said to be herd coming from down the tunnels.

Several people had fallen onto the track in modern times also. Were they pushed or did they jump, we would never find out unless one of the spirits revealed themselves to such people as were staying there tonight.

The three men had all read up on the station, its history and its ghosts. Their plan was to spend the night here and record any unnatural happenings.

To do this they were armed with several devices. Tape recorders, video camera equipment with night vision recording and also a piece of kit borrowed from a TV camera man.

It was a laser, Mike took one of the receivers down to the north end of the platform while Brian took the other to the south end. Once lined up the third member of the party turned it on.

The purpose of this piece of equipment served as an eye. If something broke the laser beam an alarm would sound. This meant that the three members of the expedition could explore the tunnels and not have to keep an eye on the platform.

The men stood at the north end of the platform checking watches and testing torches, they're nights hunting was about to begin. As they turned to leave Dave caught sight of something out of the corner of his eye. "Look!" he said in a hushed, but excited voice. as they all turned Dave was the only one to catch sight of the figure. It happened in a second, the look of shock on the figures face as it looked at them, then he fell off of the platform as a rush of air come down the tunnel. It was the sort of warm blast that signals the approach of an oncoming train, though none appeared. The laser eye omitted an electronic bing-bong. The alarm echoed through the tunnels, "Did you see that? Did you?" David asked excitedly.

The others hadn't and to add insult to injury only David had his camera running. It would be luck more then good judgement if he had caught any of it on tape.

At this moment their was no time to check it, they were on a tight schedule. Minutes later they were slowly and carefully making their way along the northbound track, the three night vision cameras scanning every inch of the tunnel. Water droplets dripped through from the curved ceiling, at first the embellished echo of each drip made the three investigators jump out of their skin before continuing in a more scientific vain.

"Shall we rest here?" George asked his two friends.

"Why here?" Arthur was curious. They had hardly gone fifty yards down one of the tunnels.

"Because," George began to reply, "we are directly under the cellar of the theatre were John Hampton was murdered."

"Ah" said Dave with enthusiasm. Such was his enthusiasm his voice echoed up and down the tunnel. "Shhh." hissed George. The mono syllable also echoed around them.

“We don’t want to wake anyone up do we.” It was Arthur who broke the atmosphere that had started to shroud the evening.

The moment came as a little light relief to the three investigators. Still their was defiantly a heavy oppressive atmosphere in the tunnel. The temperature had dropped several degrees since leaving the platform. Pitch black surrounded them. Now the light of the station had long been left behind. The expression about not been able to see a hand in front of your face had never been so true in Dave’s reckoning. Navigating along the tunnel would have been impossible without the aid of the night vision cameras.

This would be the first Vigil of the evening, as practised two of the three, Arthur and George sat back to back each viewing the tunnel in either direction. Dave stood off to one side with his back toward the tunnel wall, his camera panning around the area were his two friends sat.

Many ghost hunts of this type ended in disappointment. All ghost hunters only wished for one thing, to capture an apparition on camera, only a select few had ever done so.

For just over an hour they stayed in that one location scanning the surrounding area.

“Shall we move on?” Arthur’s’ voice broke the silence. This made Dave jump out of his skin.

“I agree.” Confirmed George.

“Me also.” Came in Dave.

“Come on then” the two seated on the floor slowly began to stand.

“There.” Shouted Dave. On his screen he saw something moving, then it was gone.

“Where, where?” shouted the other two.

All three crowded round the tiny screen on Dave’s camera. He rewound it back thirty seconds and waited. Though the camera wasn’t stationary at the time of the recording a shape was clearly visible in the frame, only if it was for part of a second.

The jubilation of the three investigators was soon over come by annoyance, “Just another thirty seconds and we would have had that.”

“I would have had a clear shot of that.” Protested George.

Once at the point of the tunnel where they estimated the apparition had been Dave took an EMF reading. The Electromagnetic Force Metre was a tool often used by ghost hunters. It showed a slightly higher reading than normal, but that could be put down to the numerous cables that ran the length of the tunnels.

“Nothing out of the ordinary.”

“We move on then?” George was eager to move on.

Moving down the tunnel the track split. A choice needed to be made.

“Which way now?” Dave asked Arthur, who looked at the map before checking his watch.

“We can’t stray too far. We only have two hours left. I suggest going right, agreed?”

“You’re the boss.” Agreed George. He was happy to be here in the dark tunnels, anyway was good for him.

“I have a feeling about the left hand tunnel.” Dave said shinning his torch down the left hand branch of the track.

“We agreed, no splitting up.” Arthur said firmly.

“I know, I know.” Dave knew the rules, but, “meet back here in one hour?”

“Ok,” Arthur said reluctantly, “but if you fall and knock yourself out, its nothing to do with me.” He turned to George, “George?”

“I’m with your Arthur.”

Dave watch them leave. Once they had disappeared round the bend he made off to the left of the points.

Arthur and George slowly edged their way along the line toward their third point which was a notorious point, workmen had reported sightings on several occasions.

Time was difficult to judge in the dark tunnels. George estimated it to be a five minutes to the service platform. This was the sight of a murder.

Two engineers were working on the line in between trains. A dispute had started between the two men over a women, what it was we may never know, but the dispute turned into a fight. The

outcome of the struggle was that one of the mens life was ended as he fell in front of a moving train. That was the story which was reported, did he fall or was he pushed?

The platform was the location of the next vigil. Both men positioned themselves at either end and pointed their cameras toward one another. Any movement on the service platform would be detected.

Dave had also found a similar service platform down his own line. He too sat at the end of the platform and pointed his camera toward the other end.

Dave had joined the other two ghost hunters eight months previous after a conversation with a colleague who turned out to be a mutual friend of them all. Dave contacted the pair and joined the group. He was convinced that ghost must exist in some shape or form. Over history too many sightings had been reported and not only by the usual attention seeking cranks or half mad freaks. Members of the Royal Family had reported seeing the spectres of monarchs long past away. Not only members of the monarchy, but two members of the royal household reported see the famous ghost of Herne the Hunter in the grounds of Windsor Castle in 1977. Prime Ministers had reported figures silently moving around the Palace of Westminster in the early of the morning. If all these people had reported such occurrences they're must surely be something in it.

Mediums, now their was a different case, hundreds of these charlatans had appeared over history, from the ancient world throw the Victorian hay day to the modern TV physics, they have all plied their trade. None of them had ever convinced him of their authenticity.

His mind was also open to scientific explanations to the existence of ghosts. Einstein looked into the possibility of links to other dimensions, was it possible that the evidence of these links were ghosts?

Sitting alone in alleged haunted houses gave him a lot of time to run through many theories and possibilities on the subject. At

this moment in time he could not concentrate on anything, the tunnel felt cold, colder then the last had been.

Silently Arthur and George sat waiting. It would be a fruitless one. The platform where the murder had taken place was currently occupied by Dave. Unbeknown to them they were sitting on the wrong platform. Their expectations were high though, not knowing of their wrong location. When a single point of light flashed on George's camera screen he almost jumped for joy. Arthur on the other hand saw nothing.

Dave stared at the small camera screen, then into the darkness. The dark could play tricks on the eyes, as he looked into the blackness shapes seemed to twist and turn, the only way of stopping it was to focus. Focus on the only point of light, the camera screen.

Why he had come down here alone he could not tell, at the time it just felt right to him. No logical explanation could be given for it. could logic be applied to the subject he was fascinated with? As an amateur parapsychologist his job was to apply science to anything that may happen in an evenings investigation.

He was fast approaching the point where he knew his instincts were wrong. Then the silence was broken, a scuttling sound could clearly be heard coming from somewhere in the darkness. He jumped up and swung the camera round into the direction he thought the noise was coming from. There was nothing there, what was making the noise?

Then he saw it. a rat scuttled along line of the channels adjacent to the track. He sat back down with a sigh. Once again he set the camera to look down the platform.

It was now 5.30am, the sun was coming up over the horizon and the city once more awoke for a new day. Still deep underground George and Arthur were preparing to make their way back down to the rendezvous point.

Gathering their bits and pieces together they jumped down off of the service platform and made off back toward the station.

Dave watched his camera. Nothing. Turning on his touch he checked his watch, 5.39am. it was time to leave. Then he stopped, frozen to the spot.

On the screen stood a man. He was dressed in Victorian attire, not a gentleman's clothes though, more a workman. Large boots, black coat and an old bowler hat on his head. The figure looked directly at Dave who had frozen to the spot with fear. He dared to look up from the screen to view the apparition. Slowly his eyes lifted, he was almost too afraid to look. It then he saw it, it was real, well as real as a ghost could be. The figure turned toward the track and walked toward it. its left foot stepped off the platform, his body followed falling towards the rails. It never landed though. Before it hit the track it was gone. Dave had turned away as the blast of warm air came rushing toward him along the tunnel.

He sat there in silence, too afraid to move. His body shook like a leaf in the wind.

The sound of the air conditioning came on. This almost gave him a heart attack. He picked up his camera and quickly made off back toward the rendezvous point.

Arthur and George were already at the intersecting points, "He must have already gone." Said George, his torch trained on his watch.

"Ey, your right, come on."

As Arthur spoke those words Dave had reached the points, but both parties didn't meet. Somehow or other Dave had taken a wrong turning further up the line. His mind was on his experience and not on the geography of the line. The fact that he had taken a wrong turn was unknown to him, one intersection looked very much like another.

He knew time was against him, so he pressed on. A point of light greeted him as he came around the long sweeping bend, there in the distance was the station.

His two colleagues saw the lights of the station as they rounded a bend in the track also. Dave had somehow managed to enter the station from the other direction to Arthur and George.

Both parties were within twenty yards of the tunnel emerging into the station when a sound stopped them all in their tracks.

The sound was the bing-bong of the motion sensitive laser going off. Dave felt himself unable to move were as Arthur and George ran the remaining part of the line jumping up onto the platform to inspect the laser.

Dave could see his two friends on the platform and once out into the light he too climbed up and inspected the transmitter at the opposite end of the platform. He checked the piece of equipment that was still sounding out its alarm.

“the trains must have started again.” He thought to himself out loud. He could feel a warm rush of air coming from down the tunnel.

Suddenly he dropped his camera as he felt a sharp jab of pain in his right hand side.

Arthur looked up alerted by a cry, at the other end of the platform he saw what looked very much like Dave flying through the air towards the track. Arthur looked on paralysed with fear, was this a replay of what Dave had seen earlier that night? The body propelled itself through the air off the platform, as it flew over the track a train thundered out of the tunnel hitting the body. For a second gravity held it against the front of the cab before it disappeared under the wheels.

Both men ran down the platform to where the body had been launched into eternity. Arthur looked up and down the track looking for any sign of a body, nothing was visible.

George picked up the camera which lay on the floor. He had an uneasy feeling. “Remember what Dave said he saw earlier, someone falling.”

He rewound the tape in the camera and pressed the play button. The video that Dave shot earlier was shaky, but a man could clearly be seen falling in front of a train.

Rewinding the footage they watched it again, this time freezing the image at the only point which the alleged ghosts face could be seen. They both stared at the small screen, “My God,” Arthur was the first to see the likeness, “that’s Dave.”

FINI

A Message from The Grave

The cold wind blew the sleet across the graveyard, whipping into the faces of the graveside mourners. This was not an uncommon sight, another accident in one of the many factories springing up in the towns due to the onset of mechanisation, the industrial revolution was changing the face of the land both urban and rural.

The man in the plain coffin was Alfred Woodman, a labourer from one of the many mills which sat on the banks of the River Hull.

As the Vicar finished off the service the widow of the man in the box, Rose through a hand full of clay into the grave and then the mourners dispersed over the street to The Ship Inn public house.

The Vicar returned to the Church as the grave diggers began to fill in the hole, finally placing the turf on the top of the small grave shaped mound protruding over the natural lye of the damp grassy ground.

On entering the vestry the Vicar removed his cassock and shivered. The room was cold and damp, it smelt of old books and yellowing paper. He lit a candle for it was starting to get dark, it was now late in the afternoon and the three gas lights that lined the main street were now lit.

He was cold, a quick nip from the bottle of whiskey which he kept in the old free standing cupboard would soon put pay to that. He opened the door and looked in. the bottle normally sat out of view behind a pile of hymn books on the left hand side of the second shelf, but on moving the pile of books he saw the bottle had gone.

It was only then that he realised someone else was in the room with him, he turned back toward the door. Sitting behind the half open door was a man in late middle age, the Verger. In one hand he held the whiskey bottle, in the other a glass.

"Alright Vicar?" he said raising the glass in salute before taking a generous slug of the drink. "Theirs a bit of a nip in the air, I

thought I'd just have a quick 'un to keep the cold out." He said pouring another large measure into the glass.

"Tell me," as the Vicar, "just what do you think your doing Verger?"

"Oh, just helping myself," he said his voice slurring slightly, "but then you'd know all about that wouldn't you?"

"My dear fellow, I think you are under a misapprehension."

"Oh, no." he replied resolutely.

"You've been drinking. You can't be sure what your saying. Why don't we just forget all about this and say nothing more of it."

"I know exactly what I'm saying, Martin."

Calling the Vicar by his Christian name took him back somewhat, allowances must be made for a drunkard. "I've seen you every Sunday taking your own cut of the offertory , all the money from that service you have just given, not all of that will make it into the church coffers."

For a moment the Vicar thought, "Do you have any proof of this?" he asked in a calm voice.

"Only the proof of my own eyes." The Verger took another drink.

"come and see me at the vicarage tomorrow, I'm sure that we can discuss your future salary. I think your more than due a rise."

The Verger took the hint. A smile appeared on his face. The two men had come to an understanding, that would do, for now.

On the third attempt he managed to stand. Realising he still held the bottle in his hand he mentally plotted a path back to the cupboard. The Vicar could see what the Vergers eyes were trying to plan. Not wanting the contents of the cupboard spread across the floor he decided to dissuade his employee, "No, no." he said quickly, "You can keep the bottle." There was hardly anything left of it in any case.

"Ah, right you are." He shuffled round and made for the door. All his concentration was on getting out of the room. His senses didn't react to the noise behind him.

The noise was the Vicar scraping a candlestick along the table top, an old heavy silver candle stick.

Moments later the same piece of high regalia was falling through the air before embedding itself into the Vergers head.

The Verger felt no pain. The alcohol had numbed his body. His face hit the cold hard stone flagged floor of the church. His nose exploded as it impacted pushing the piece of bone tat serves as the ridge up into his head. If he wasn't killed by the blow of the candlestick then he was dead now. A trickle of blood seeped out from under his broken face.

The Vicar panicked, though he controlled it well. Dragging the body back into the vestry before dropping the Vergers feet down on the floor.

What could he do with the body? Frantically he looked around the room, searching for the catalyst of an idea.

The Crypt, he could put it in the Crypt. No one ever went down there. No, to risky, occasionally some one would venture down there. He had no transport, he couldn't take it away.

On the floor one of the Vergers eyes was looking up at him. It was unnerving to say the least.

On the floor of the vestry lay a rug. He could roll the body up in it, that would do for now. As he turned it through ninety degrease it groaned. The noise gave the Vicar the fright of his life..

Suddenly something else added to his terror, the sound of the front door to the church opening. The latch clinked while the old iron hinges creaked as it opened.

The Vicar froze with fear.

The sound of heavy feet walking through the church could clearly be made out. The clergyman was almost paralysed with fear, but what did he have to fear? Apart from the events of the past few moments, nothing.

Stepping over the carpet covered body he looked out of the door to see who was in the church.

The figure, a man had walked in, the Vicar recognised him as one of the mourners from the funeral.

“Can I help you sir?” asked the Vicar closing the vestry firmly behind him.

The visitor was cold and wet, snow clung to his brown overcoat and around the soles of his boots.

“Hello again Vicar, I was er,” he paused for a moment then held out a coin in between his fingers, “looking for the collection box.”

The Vicar didn’t believe him. Though outwardly he remained calm his head was spinning. It seemed to him that it was more likely that this man had come in chancing his arm to see what he could make off with. “It’s by the door.” The Vicar replied. As he did he placed the candlestick on the altar, with a bit of luck this man would make off with it.

Thank you Vicar.” The mourner turned and walked off only pausing to drop the coin in the box before slamming the door closed.

Now back to more serious things. What to do with the body laying in the vestry? The man who had just left had given the Vicar the answer.

At twelve thirty that night the wind howled through the trees of the churchyard. Sleet still blew down from the north battering the 14th Century Norman church. The only light source was coming from The Ship public house, this threw just enough illumination for the Vicar to work by.

He carefully took the turf off the top of the mound and laid it to one side, then with the grave digger’s spade began to dig.

With the grave only being a few hours old the loose Earth came out easily, each spade full was on the whole dry and powdery. Once down around five feet the blade of the tool hit wood.

Looking around to ensure the surrounding village was all quiet the Vicar rolled the body of the Verger into the grave. It made a thud as it hit the coffin below. The Vicar breathed a sigh of relief, but there was still work to do.

Picking up the spade once again he started to backfill the hole. It only took a matter of minutes and then it was done, the turf placed back on top and there it was done. Nobody would ever know. More to the point the grave couldn’t be opened without

an order from the local Magistrate and he was a very religious man, he didn't believe in the digging up of graves.

fatigued he clean down the spade before returning it to the tool shed and heading back toward the vicarage.

After a good half bottle of whiskey he retired to bed. He should have slept soundly, the effects of his labours mixed with the strong liqueur, but he couldn't. the face of the man lying dead in the grave haunted his mind.

The next day was a Saturday and it was a weary looking Vicar that took the Wedding service of two local young people. An invitation to the wedding breakfast had been issued to him by the brides parents. The thing with village life was everybody knew one another so to refuse would be altogether rude.

How he stayed awake through it he did not know. A good nights sleep would be assured tonight.

It was his normal routine to take a walk around the church and grave yard last thing at night, but as he came out of the Ship Inn he didn't cross the street to the lich- gate. He decided to go home. Another night of torment ensued. Now though not only did he see the face of the verger, but he saw him standing at the end of an open grave, with what looked like a candlestick in his hand. He lost count of how many times the vision came to him, the last one of the night the spectre beckoned him to come closer. After that he did not even dare close his eyes. His night had been spent in a cold sweet.

After the Sunday morning service no one mentioned the absence of the verger. He wasn't very much liked around the village, he wasn't one of them, he was from outside.

Once the last of the congregation had left the Vicar returned to his vestry and quickly changed. On his way out he noticed that the candlestick had gone from the alter, he allowed himself a smile of relief.

Over the following week nothing out of the ordinary happened in the village. Life returned to normal, no one seemed to miss the Verger, so nothing more was said. The weather too turn fair, even the snowdrops were coming into flower. Then tragedy hit the close knit community. Long standing resident Albert Hurd

died. He had lived his whole life in the village, the only time he'd left was to fight in the Great War.

The funeral was attended by almost the entire community, the Vicar gave the service at the graveside as was the wishes of Albert.

"I am the resurrection," he spoke the words from the heart as he had known Albert all his life, but then he suddenly stopped. Something had caught his eye. The grave he had buried the Verger in had not fallen. The bulge of grave shaped earth would normally have started to subside after a week. It was still as he had left it that night, over a week earlier.

After the service everyone gravitated across the street to the Inn, even the grave diggers went to toast the old man before filling the hole. This act was highly irregular, but today it was tolerated.

The vicar took full advantage of this, he took one of the spades and raised it above his head before bringing it down hared on the mound of Earth on the Vergers grave. He spent a good few five minutes flattening it down. It looked much better, almost flat. He stood back to admire his handy work. A cold shiver ran down his spine. Out of the corner of his eye he saw something, it made his heart stop and blood run cold. Slowly he turned around. Fear filled him as he worked up the courage to turn to see what was there, something from the dark reaches of his mind. Something told him, even before he turn, he knew the spectre of the Verger had returned to haunt him.

As he looked he realised that all it was, was a piece of black fabric in a tree. The only ghost he knew existed was the third part of the holy trinity.

With a sense of relief he to followed the example of the rest of the village and joined them in the pub.

As darkness fell the mourners were still going strong in the public house. The wind and rain had whipped up outside, so everybody stayed in the pub.

The vicar felt uneasy, not with being in a public house, he'd spent many nights ion there. Something else troubled him,

home, he thought would be the best place to be tonight. A fire in the grate always made him feel better.

He opened the door and stepped out into the cold dark night. Dropping his head toward the pavement he set off toward the vicarage. Then something made him stop and look over the street toward the church, a light was shining through the stained glass window.

The lich gate opened with a creek, the wind blowing it shut behind him. Head down against the elements he crossed the church yard. Looking up again he realised there was no light coming out of the church at all. It must have been a reflection off of the moon, or maybe the pub.

He found that he had come to a stop beside the still open grave containing Albert Hurds uncovered coffin. The grave diggers hadn't been back to fill it in yet, no doubt they were still in the pub.

Once again he noticed the grave he had flattened earlier that afternoon. The mound was back? He had spent all that time flattening it and had come back, was someone playing a joke on him? Was it the Verger, maybe he wasn't dead? No that can't be, he'd buried him.

"Is this yours?" a familiar voice said. It came from the Vicars left hand side.

He turned to look, but no one stood there, "Here." Said the voice again.

The Vicar turned to see in front of him the Verger, face twisted and blooded. His right arm was raised above his head in the hand a candlestick.

"But your dead?" the Vicar struggled out the words as a clap of thunder sounded.

The candle stick came down on the Vicars head, his body falling into the open grave.

A week later on the request of the magistrate Albert Hurds grave was opened. On top of Albert's coffin lay the body of the vicar, the missing candle stick in his hand.

The grave from the funeral a week previous was also opened and the body of the Verger was found laying in peace with a smile on his cold white face.

FINI

Whiteout

It started off as a fine bright, but cold March morning. Arnold Bennett had packed his ruck-sack early and said goodbye to his wife Jo and two daughters before setting off on a mornings walking. He would be back for the family Sunday lunch at one thirty as normal.

The route he was going to take he had planned several day previous. The walk would be taking in some of the best footpaths in this part of Easy Yorkshire, The Wolds Way, The Hudson Way and the Beverly twenty too name but a few. It had been nearly three months since last he had trampled the footpaths around his home and he looked on the days walking with anticipation.

Prepared for all weather his body was clad in thermal underwear and waterproofs from head to toe, the conditions were notorious for rapid change up on the hills at this time of year. When walking it was vital you were prepared for all conditions.

For two miles he followed the road through three different villages, but now it was time to head off into the numerous wooded arrears on the Wolds. The footpath was steep, the backs of his legs began to ache as he slowly laboured up Spout Hill. Half way up he had to stop and take a breather, this was also an excellent viewing point. What a sight it was. Below was the village of Brantingham, the church spire which looked so high was now way below him.

The sun shone, it was a warm morning, a welcome change after the cold winter endured over the last few weeks.

Minutes later he was beneath the protective canopy of the trees. Underfoot the ground was soft, mud stuck to his boots increasing their weight two fold. The soft ground made the climbs difficult, but not as difficult of the descents. He found it easier to run down the hills then walk. This was from a man who hadn't run anywhere for at least ten years. He had had no need to, college life was a slow dignified affair, no need to rush about, not at his senior level anyway.

By the time 11 o'clock came he was far out as the village of Hotham. He sat himself down on a grassy bank and searched in his ruck-sack for something to eat. The feeling of hunger never occurred to him while walking, but as soon as he stopped to admire the view the empty feeling in his stomach returned, it was time for a pre lunch snack.

As he sat eating his apple he looked out at the panoramic view the location. This had to be one of his favourite places, it was so quiet here. The only noise to interrupt his thoughts was the occasional bird song high up in the trees.

As he sat there something touched his nose. It was cold, icy cold. He looked up into the sky, snow had started to fall.

From his back pack he took his woollen hat and pulled it over his head, tossing the apple core away he once again set off down the hill to find civilisation before the weather turned too bad.

His watch showed one o'clock, but the sky was black. Before he could get down the hill the snow had started to fall heavily the large flakes laying quickly on the ground. It was not only the fact that the snow was now dense but the wind had picked up and was blowing the snow almost horizontally into his face.

Arnold knew that he would have to find some kind of shelter and wait for the storm to calm down.

The greatest protection against the elements were the plantations which run alongside the footpath. Setting himself against a tree he watched the storm from the relative comfort of the wood.

Several times that afternoon he tried lighting a fire. In his meagre survival kit he carried a box of safety matched, unfortunately he couldn't find any dry material to burn. In the end he gave up. He could feel the cold starting to effect him. The overwhelming feeling to fall asleep hit him hard, he knew that if he did his body temperature would drop and he may never wake a gain.

The snow continues to drive across the valley, now he couldn't see the other side, visibility was down to zero, no chance of moving now.

His head nodded one to many times. Quickly he woke himself and made a conscious effort to stay awake.

Then he realised, the snow storm had stopped as quickly as it had started, the sky had cleared, "That's strange." He said to himself, he had never seen weather change as quickly as that before.

The lights of the Hotham Arms shone in the valley below. He could make it there without too much effort. His boots crunched in the newly laid snow. Footing was difficult. The ground was still soft and muddy under the fresh snow.

Eventually he made it, cold and tired, but he was there in one piece. His faced job once the life had returned to his fingers was to ring his wife and tell he was ok and he required a lift home.

The main entrance door to the bar closed behind him. The heat of the open fire hit his face turning his cheeks bright red.

The room was empty apart from two Policemen standing at the bar, both were looking at a ordinance survey map.

Arnold sat himself down by the fire. He had been here many times before and knew the landlord would offer table service when the pub was quiet, so no need to stand at the bar.

The two officers of the law didn't offer any greeting on his arrival, but to be honest he didn't really care, he was just happy to be by the fire.

A few minutes past with still no sign of the landlord, must be changing a barrel? Arnolds' body had started to thaw out now and a call of nature was required.

On his return from the toilet he had just resumed his fire side seat when the front door opened, a blast of cold air rushed in followed by a snow covered body. As the newcomer crossed to the bar the landlord appeared from the cellar door.

"Alan, how's it going out there?"

"We've found him, looks as though he's a gonna though. Their bringing him down now. An ambulance is waiting on Dale Road."

"Where was he?" asked one of the Policemen breaking into the conversation.

Someone must have got lost on the hills, Arnold thought to himself.

“Up on top of the Dale.” Alan replied pointing a finger toward the corner of the room.

“You would have thought an intelligent man like that would have had more sense then to be out on a day like this.” The second Policemen said entering the conversation.

“Who was he?” Alan asked as he removed his snow cover coat. The landlord had been pouring a glass of brandy from one of the many optics during the discussion. “Here Alan.” He said placing the glass next to him while Alan sat on a barstool.

“He was a lecturer at the local University, his wife rang us saying he was normally home by two o’clock.”

Arnold span round in his chair, if he was from the university then he probably knew him.

“Bennett,” continued the Policeman, “Professor Arnold Bennett.”

FINI

The Navigators

For nearly a century the Hull to Barnsley railway carried both passenger and freight alike, from the coal mine's of West Yorkshire to the East Yorkshire port of Hull.

The route taken by the engineers for the railway was fraught with difficulty. The major obstacle was to navigate a route traversing the system of hills know as the Yorkshire Wolds.

In many parts it was possible to overcome the difficulties by the use of cuttings and embankments, in three places though a system of tunnels were dug. The longest of these was Drewton Tunnel stretching one and a quarter miles underground. Many of the men who worked on the project lost their lives through accident and decease, this short tale tells the story of just two of them who didn't die a natural death, but net their end in a more macabre incident.

In the year 1883 a collection of Irish and English navvies gathered high up on the Yorkshire Wolds. The travelling village of tents was a sight to behold, for it was not only the rough and ready men of the railway company who camped high on the hill, but the women and children of their families.

The construction of the line was a five year project, the workers couldn't expect any holidays, the money was to good for them to pass by taking any furlough.

The work was hard and the days were long, every hour of the daylight was utilised to its maximum effect.

The days and weeks merged into one, now in the third year of the construction days and months didn't matter to the workers. Sleep, work, sleep that's all they knew.

Dates on the other hand mattered a great deal to the engineers running the project. These gentlemen were under constant pressure to keep on target and under budget.

Now the real test of the workforce was to begin, a series of three tunnels had to be driven through the hills. To add to the complication the top half of the tunnel was to be driven through clay while the lower half would be cut out of chalk. The clay

would pose no problem and would be excavated easily, the chalk however would have to be blasted out.

At the start of the project gun powder was being used to blow out the cuttings. Powder was not a very powerful explosive. A decision was made to try a new type of explosive, nitro-glycerine.

No one realised how volatile this explosive was, several men lost their lives transporting the liquid, not to mention in the mixing process.

On the 1st May 1883 work commenced on the longest of the three tunnels, Drewton Tunnel a whole mile and a quarter long. A series of shafts would be sunk along the line of the track to the correct depth. The tunnel would then be dug out in short sections linking the shafts. Each shaft also served the purpose as an exhaust chimney for the smoke and steam generated by the engines that would pass through.

The night before the work on the shafts was due to commence six men decided to sneak out of the camp to find some local entertainment. It was strictly forbidden for the men to leave the camp, they were being paid good money for their labours plus the fact that bed and board were also provided. The company did not want the efficiency of the work force compromised by into of alcohol.

Despite this, these six men walked the two miles down into the village of Little Weighton where the lights of the Black Horse Inn Public House shone invitingly.

On entering, the band of men were greeted with silence while the locals eyed them suspiciously. The workmen on the hill were not entirely trusted, they were a law to themselves. Rumour was rife, sheep and pigs were reported to have gone missing and that was not to mention they were destroying the farm land of the surrounding area with their machines.

“Evening Gents.” Announced the Landlord in a friendly booming voice.

With the acceptance of the Landlord to the strangers the locals turned back to their drinks and conversations. Minutes later the six men were seated while the Publican carried a tray containing

six pints of ale over to them. The navvies watched him approach, none of them had taken a drink for one year. He put the tray down on the rectangular table.

“Cheers.” Said Shamus in his broad Irish accent. Shamus wasn’t his true name, all the navvies had a byname as they were known. This was for any men who fell foul of the law. No one knew their companions Christian name or any other name for that matter, if they didn’t know their name they it would make any prosecution impossible for the Police.

Around the table sat Shamus, an Irishman with the gift of the gab. He could charm the birds out of the trees with his stories, songs and jokes.

Digger was a local man, no one knew from where exactly, but the East Riding twang in his voice gave him away as a native of these parts.

Two Irishmen sat next to him, Blaster, who had the job of handling the new explosive and Boneman, such called because his previous job was digging graves in many of Dublin’s cemeteries.

The last two men were from either end of England, Piper was from the depths of Cornwall while Miner hailed from the coal fields of the North East.

Each man devoured their drinks with intense ferocity. “You’ll be wanting another?” asked the Landlord, knowing the answer before it came.

“Ey’ bonny lad, keep ‘um coming.” Replied Miner wiping the froth from his top lip using his sleeve.

“I’ve been waiting a long time for that, so I have.” Blaster said sitting back on his chair.

“It sure is a fine drop of the ale, a gift from the Lord himself wouldn’t you say?” Shamus added to the complements.

Moments later a second round of drinks arrived at the table.

“You men from the railway?” asked the Landlord.

“That’s right Inn Keeper.” Digger replied.

“I hear your digging a tunnel through the hills?”

“Blasting a tunnel more like.” Boneman told him in between mouthfuls of ale.

“Blasting, make sure ya’ don’t disturb Brother Samuel.” He picks up the tray and turns to go back to the bar.

“Hold ya’ wee still there,” Miner called after him, “what do ya mean by that?”

“He’ll think Heaven I is coming to claim him once I get going.” Laughed Blaster.

“This Brother, does he live up on the hills?” Shamus asked in a quiet voice.

“No, not live exactly.” Said the Landlord.

“What then?”

“You won’t have heard the tale of Brother Samuel I suppose.” The Landlord pulled up a chair and sat himself down.

“Two hundred years ago the Archbishop of York was making a journey from York Minster to Beverly Minster. He was travelling by stagecoach with four monks. As well as his travelling companions on the coach was a large chest full of money on jewels, why the Archbishop and a collection of monks wee in need of such riches I know not, but...

they stopped here at this very coaching house to change horses and stop for refreshment. That was not a wise move, in those days the Inn was frequented by highwaymen.

One of them got wind of the Bishops cargo. When they left on their final part of their journey to Beverly the highwayman followed them.

Once the coach was high up on the Wolds he made his attack. The occupants of the coach were made to disembark and remove the chest.

No one knows exactly what happened then, there were many variations of the tale spoken by the travellers passing through. All of them though agreed on one thing, one of the travelling companions was not a monk, but a member of the militia appointed to protect the Archbishop.

The guard made an attack on the aggressor, as he did the highwayman fired both his pistols, the guard took a ball in the leg while the other shot hit one of the monks, killing him instantly.

The bishop was sent on his way to Beverly with two the two monks and the wounded guard.

The highwayman was said to have then buried the chest to return for it later and dragged the body of the monk into a nearby cops were it was probably eaten by the wildlife.

Now, the highwayman was caught and trial at Beverly assizes two weeks after the robbery, no one knows if he ever came back for the chest or whether its still buried up on the Wolds somewhere. Many from round these parts reckon its still there because Brother Samuel protects it from fortune hunters, he still stands over it watching for the highway man to come back to collect it.”

Five of the navigators sat still and silent listening to the tale, Digger however let out a large rumbling laugh. “Oh, well that’s alright then, I’ll keep an eye out for him.”

“You shouldn’t mock the spirits, he’s been seen.” Said the Landlord gravely.

“Get my friends another drink Landlord and have on for yourself,” he said in a cheery voice, “you’ve entertained us well with your story.”

Silently the Landlord returned to the bar.

The moon was full as they walked back up the dale toward the camp site. Much beer had been consumed and the walk back took longer then the journey earlier that night.

All were silent as they crossed a grassy field that served as the boundary of the camp, none of them wanted to be caught returning from their evenings drinking, apprehension would certainly result in dismissal.

Blaster was taking up the rear of the line when all of a sudden he walked straight into the back of a stationary Boneman.

“What the hell ya doing man.” Blaster asked in an aggressive whisper.

Boneman said nothing, he just pointed up toward a small clump of trees at the brow of the hill. They were well illuminated by the full moon, a slight mist hung around them.

Blaster looked in the direction of Bonemans' index finger. What was he looking at? “What Is it?”

Bonemans' voice faltered , "The Monk, he was up their. I saw him watching us."

Blaster knew there was no time for this. He pushed Boneman in his back, "Go on," he said, "get up there before were seen, you've drank too much that's your trouble."

Had he seen the spirit of Brother Samuel, Blaster hadn't seen anything, it must have been a trick of the light, that and the large amount of alcohol consumed.

The next morning at first light the workers were gathered together awaiting instruction for their days labours.

Digger and Shamus were shown to a point up high on the Wold, their task to start on one of the chimney shafts. As they started to dig they heard a bang from down in the dale. It was louder then any other explosion they had heard before, that must be Blaster with his new explosive. Work must have started on the mouth of the tunnel.

The sun had been out and the morning was warm, now however a cold mist had descended. As the two men looked above the parapet of the hole the mist had thickened so quickly that the bottom of the dale was lost in a white haze.

Above them about half a mile to the west a hooded figure silently watched them digging.

Diggers' shovel hit something hard. The sound the reverberated from the blade was not the usual clank of the tool hitting a stone or piece of rock, the sound was more of a hollow thud.

On hearing it Shamus turned to see what his friend had hit. "Sounds like wood." Shamus said. The two men looked into each others eyes. Did they already know what it was they had found. Both thought the same thoughts, could this be a box, a box buried two hundred years ago? "Get the earth from round it."

Both men started to scrape the clay away from the top of the box. Their hands were covered in mud and were numb with the cold, still this didn't deter them. With the top of the box exposed they set about loosening the earth from around the sides. It was slow work, the box was surrounded by heavy thick compact clay.

Finally using the spade as a lever the box came free. Digger put his head out of the hole and looked around. As far as he could see no one was in the area, all was quiet, only a crow let out a series of rasping cries.

Shamus raised his spade ready to bring it down to release the lock.

“No.” said Digger, “Not here. We carry on with our work, we don’t want anyone to become suspicious. At dark we’ll take it back to our tent, then open it.”

“Right you are.” Replied the charming Irish voice.

the afternoon became colder the atmosphere more apperceive. Several times Digger felt a nudge in his back, he presumed that it must be Shamus having a joke with him. If it was then the joke was no longer funny. “Would you mind refraining from doing that?” he eventually demanded.

“From what?” said the Irishman in a cheery voice.

“From jabbing me in the back.”

“You won’t be having a laugh with me would ya?” he said smiling.

The dig continued, the chimney was now so deep that the debris had to be lifted out in buckets via a ladder. This took time, time was something they didn’t have.

“I’ll be going to get the big bucket and rope.” Shamus eventually said tired of climbing up and down the ladder.

“Off ya go then.” Digger followed his friend up the ladder and watched him disappear into the mist. As he set off back down the ladder his eye caught sight of the chest. He wondered what was in it.

now back down in the hole he had loosened up a foot of earth with his axe. As he stood up straight to stretch his back he once again felt the jab in his back. That joker must have quietly descended into the pit to play another joke on him.

He turned quickly to confront his friend. Shamus though wasn’t there, no one was. A shiver ran down his spine. Quickly he climbed the ladder where he expected to see Shamus throwing stones down into the pit.

Shamus was nowhere to be seen. He was all alone. Daring not to return down the shaft he sat on the chest. As he stared into the middle distance he could hear the sound of Shamus coming back up the hill. He stood to greet his friend back, at that moment in time he would have welcomed the sight of anyone. In the distance he could just make out Shamus coming back up the hill. His silhouette black against the white fog.

The rasping sound of the crow took his attention toward the small cops of trees that sat on the top of the dale. He had not seen any birds flying, but they must be somewhere around.

Turning once more toward the direction of the approaching navvy he saw, he saw nothing. Where had Shamus gone. He'd just seen him coming up the hill. What was going on today, he sat back down on the box and waited.

"What will ya be doing sitting on ya backside man?" said the cheery voice of Shamus. It brought Digger out of his daydream with a fright. "We've got work top do ya know." He said dropping the large bucket and rope.

"You go down and shovel." Digger said, his face as white as the mist that surrounded them.

"Why would that be?" the Irishman asked suspiciously.

"I was getting a strange feeling down there, I didn't like it."

"Your loosing your nerve." Smiled Shamus climbing down the ladder into the hole.

As soon as his head was beneath the ground level Digger started to lower the bucket. Shamus shovelled the muck into the bucket before Digger pulled it up and emptied the contents onto the ever growing pile. The cycle continued most of the afternoon.

Shamus was keen to finish the shaft, so when Digger was too long in returning the bucket he called up the shaft chasing him up, "Come on with ya, ya English women, get a move on." He waited, for a minute he waited. Eventually he put down his spade and began to climb the ladder. As his foot hit the second rung he heard the familiar sound of the bucket banging against the ladder on it way back down, "'Bout time." he thought.

As darkness began to fall the blade of the shovel hit chalk. The shaft was finished.

Shamus climbed up the ladder to find his friend emptying the last full bucket of clay onto the pile.

"Right, lets get the chest back to..." Shamus looked down in disbelief, were the chest sat a square of clear grass sat, soil piled up all around it. "Where is it?" he asked.

"What?" replied Digger innocently.

"The chest man, the chest."

"He..." his voice broke off before it could finish the word, "But?"

"A jokes a joke. Now come on where have ya hidden it?"

Digger hadn't, "Me, you must have. I haven't touched it."

"I've been away down in that hole all afternoon, you must have moved it."

"I don't know how you could have moved it," said digger in disbelief, "but I know I didn't move it."

both men were convinced of the other mans guilt. "You," said digger, "must have done it." he pushed Shamus in the shoulder. That was the first time he had ever struck out at his friend in all the years they had know each other. Shamus stepped back to steady himself, his back foot landing dangerously close to the edge of the pit. "Well?" shouted Digger at him.

Shamus was not looking at his friend, he was looking over his left shoulder.

Behind digger was the hooded figure of a monk, his head bowed.

"Well?" Digger repeated himself once more.

The monk slowly lifted his head to reveal his face. On seeing it Shamus froze to spot. The monk lifted a hand and as if by some invisible force projecting from his white finger pushed Shamus back, he fell into the pit.

The body landed head first breaking his neck on the hard chalk floor of the pit.

It was ten minutes before Digger turned around. Eventually he did, no one was there, but on the wet ground sat the box.

His heart was beating twice as fast as normal, he couldn't breath.

The box was heavy, he couldn't carry it back to the camp on his own, he needed a barrow. Within a second he had formulated a plan. He would bury the box in the soil from the shaft then come back later to retrieve it.

That would keep it out of sight while the poor body of Shamus was retrieved from the shaft. He would have to report the accident and the body removed. The chest could wait until after all that had been dealt with. He picked up his spade and began to move the earth.

At 1am the following morning Digger wheeled a barrow up the hill. Periodically he stopped and looked around, he was sure someone was following him. At the top he looked down the hill again, maybe it was just his imagination, but he was sure he saw something moving in the moonlight.

He would have to work quickly. Picking up his spade he began to shovel. He didn't remember burying it this deep into the pile, for several minutes he dug. The sweat rolled off his forehead, frantically he worked. He had to stop to take a breather.

As he looked up there on the other side of the shaft in front of him was a pair of black shoes. Only the toes were visible, the rest was covered in a black robe. He followed the robe upward, around the waist was tied a rope belt holding the garment in place, further on up the face of a man was obscured by a hood.

It was the figure of a monk. Digger froze with abject terror. The monk lifted its head, his face was still obscured by the hood. It raised its arm, a finger pointed over Digger's shoulder.

Shaking like a kitten slowly he turned to see the blade of Shamus' shovel falling through the night air.

It struck him in the temple killing him instantly. His dead body falling into the shaft.

FINI

Gone West

The automatic garage door glided down into its frame. The white paint reflected the red glow from the black BMW's break lights. Moments later, the car pulled out of the drive and onto the main street that ran through the village of Walkington.

The journey to work was pretty much the same every day for Alexander Morgan-Taylor. The journey through the village was slow, the recently laid speed humps played hell with his front valance. At the traffic lights he, as normal turned left and took the undulating road to the crossroads, then as always turned right.

Some days the eternal monotony of the route depressed him. Now in his early forties he knew that this was his life for at least another fifteen years. It made him think of the character Reginald Perrin and his monotonous life, could he also come up with a unique solution to his boredom as the fictional character had done?

The winding road brought him out onto the Westwood Pasture. In the distance he could see his destination, the market town of Beverley. At its heart stood the Minster reaching skyward, dwarfing all the other buildings.

A week ago, the Westwood had been covered in a white blanket of snow, the panoramic views from that high vantage point could have graced any Christmas card, on the other hand it made driving treacherous.

As he sped down the tree lined road, he past the spot were it had happened. Never had he told anyone of the experience. If he had tried to tell the tale, well it couldn't be told. He himself didn't know exactly what had happened that night.

It had happened during last year's Indian summer. The Westwood was a hive of activity during the day, the sound of golf balls being hit echoed around the west end of the pasture as the players trooped around Beverley's exclusive golf club. The cows grazed while children flew all manner of colourful kites and ate the various products from the ice cream van.

As he drove home that winters night six months previous, the pasture was dark and cold. It was late at night and no one was around. Travelling up the hill the headlights of the car blazed into the darkness, the full beam illuminating the trees on either side with an eerie glow.

Something caught his eye. As if from nowhere a figure was standing by the side of the road. He was sure no one had been there seconds before. It was just someone waiting for a lift, he thought to himself, no need to stop. As the black BMW approached the figure stepped out into the road. Alexander was given no time to react. The body hit the wing of the car tossing it over the roof. In the rear view mirror Alex saw it land on the road.

The wheels screeched to a halt, each tyre leaving a black rubber skid mark on the road surface. He jumped out of the car running to the rear, as he did he fished around in the pocket of his jacket feeling for his mobile phone. Who ever this poor person was he would need an ambulance immediately.

Taking the phone out of the pocket the screen shone in the darkness, he quickly started to dial the number with his thumb, nine, nine, then stopped. Where was the body?

The road was empty, the grass verges were clear also. Slowly he walked to the spot where the body had fallen. Crouching down he examined the road. No trace of anything being there was visible, no blood, no scuff marks nothing.

Slowly he walked back to his car and examined the off side wing. Though it was dark enough light from the head lamp reflected off his camel hair coat to see the wing. Rubbing his hand along it, it was clear to him that there were no chips or dents in the panel. Surely an impact such as that should have left some kind of mark?

What should he do now? Should he go home, to leave the scene of an accident was a crime, but then, what accident? Had there even been an accident? Had he imagined it all?

The stresses of work played on his mind somewhat at the moment, in his job as a solicitor he would have to read many

last will and testaments, had his worries manifested themselves in his sub conscious?

Eventually after convincing himself no one was around and it was all in his head, he continued home.

That was almost six months ago now, every night as he drove past that spot he would try not to look at the point where it had happened, but he would. Not every night, just occasionally he would see the figure standing there, sometimes it would step out in front of him on other occasions the figure would remain by the road side.

Once at work Alex set about his normal day tasks. The pile of mail that sat in the 'in box' was perpetual. So at 9.30 that night he decided enough was enough. The day had been bright and warm for the time of year and he had missed it stuck in that office all day.

As he put his brief case in the boot of his car he looked up at the full moon shining through the only gap in a cloudy sky. The clouds that blotted out the stars look as though they could burst into a torrent of snow at any moment.

The streets of the town were quiet as the black BMW pulled out onto the main road. The first flakes of snow were beginning to fall, shivering, he turned up the heating, a warming blast of air shot out of the vents at either side of the steering wheel.

So, would he see the ghost tonight? he had come to the conclusion that it must have been a phantom that he had hit that night. As someone who had been hit by a car before and was reliving the accident. That hypothesis was not an uncommon one in the world of paranormal research, or so he was lead to believe, and that was another point. Up to that experience he was a none believer, but now his opinion had changed somewhat. Would he see it tonight, and what would it do, stand and watch, or step out in front of him? Which ever it was going to be he had become blasé to the sequence of events.

As he drove up the hill the trees glistened white with frost, they were the only points of reference in a black world. Snow flakes floated down intermittently leaving small water marks on the windscreen.

Alex took a tentative glance to the right hand verge of the road. No one living or other was there tonight. Then panic.

The front end of the car started to shake and bump uncontrollably. He hit the brakes, slowly the car came back under control. He steered it off the road and onto the grass verge. Breathing a sigh of relief he examined the front end of the vehicle. A tyre had blown out. He got back into the car and took out his mobile phone. The first entry in the phone book was the AA, he pressed the dial key. The spare wheel in the boot was all ready to be fitted, in fact it had never seen the light of day before. Alex though was a professional, he didn't pay a yearly subscription to get his own hands dirty, it also had to be taken into consideration that he didn't know one end of a jack from the other.

It would be an hour before a mechanic could reach him. An hour, he could freeze to death in an hour.

He sat there looking out into the night. Not wanting to drain the battery he turned the lights off, but left the radio playing. He listened with interest to the Moral Maze, but after only ten minutes the program finished. Nothing else on the radio interested him, so he turned it off. Several times he had the feeling that someone outside was watching him. All around was inky black, to his left the solitary glow of a light in the stand of Beverley Race Course shone like a pinprick in the night. Was someone out there watching him?

He was all alone in the middle of a large expanse of open ground, paranoia had set in. occasionally he turned on the head lights only for his peace of mind. It was on one of these moments that he realised where he was. The car had come to rest at the point where the ghost would watch him drive past.

He pressed down the locking stud on the drivers door, the central locking clicked as the rest of the doors automatically locked. The temperature was starting to drop now, the interior of the car was getting colder, shivering, he wrapped his over coat tightly around him. Turning on the engine activated the heater, warm blasts of air circulated around. This waned though once the engine was shut off.

At last he saw salvation, in the rear view mirror he could see two lights coming up the road.

“At last.” He said to himself.

The lights drew closer as he got out of the car to greet them. As the vehicle approached he stepped out into the road so the driver would be in no doubt that this was the car he had come to the rescue of.

The vehicle didn’t stop, the off-side wing hit his leg throwing him up over the roof. He landed in the middle of the road, his body broken and twisted.

The wheels of the black BMW screeched to a halt, each tyre leaving a black rubber skid mark on the road surface. The driver got out and had a look back to where the body lay, before returning to the car and driving off.

FINI

The Stairway

In a tastefully furnished first floor room Henry Sullivan sat at a writing desk. He checked through a large ledger to see who would be calling on him that day. The clock on the mantelpiece was striking eleven o'clock as Sullivan looked out of the window at the bustling city below.

The first of today's business would be calling on him shortly. A single oil lamp illuminated the room, this was placed on the top of his desk. It burned to serve only one purpose, to aid with the reading of the assorted papers piled up neatly on the desk.

The only entrance to the room was a door situated at the top of a flight of stairs. The stairway was cold and unfurnished, no carpet lay on the floor, no banister rail protruded from the wall.

It was winter outside, but even in the balmy days of summer those who had the misfortune to tread the steps up to that room would feel a chill on the back of their neck. The fortunate ones would also have the experience on the return journey back down the stairs, just though the fortunate ones.

Outside the front door of the white stone property, times were hard in the city of Hull in the year 1885. Men returning from the Crimea, of which there were many, found it difficult to fit back into civilian life, jobs for the veteran soldiers were hard to come by.

The docks thrived with cargo coming and going from all parts of the world, the port was a vital link to the Empire. In the west of the city seagulls hovered above the fish docks waiting for a tasty morsel to come their way, while on the pier, box loads of fruit were being unpacked for the Humber Street Market.

As the dockers worked, the prostitutes watched from the doorways of the many pubs knowing that for many of the men, today was pay day, a busy night ensued.

A middle aged women, shabby in appearance stepped off top flight of the staircase and stood outside MR Sullivans' door. She paused outside the door waiting a moment to compose herself. With a deep breath she knocked on the door.

For a moment nothing happened, then she felt something on the back of her neck, it was icy cold. Drawing in a short sharp breath she turned, but no one was there. The creak of the door opening took her attention back to the purpose of her visit.

“Come in Mrs Streetwater.” said Sullivan his body framed in the doorway.

The women entered the room and stood in its centre. Sullivan closed the door behind her. As the catch clicked shut Mrs Streetwater shivered.

Sullivan eyed her from head to toe looking for any evidence of new garments on her person. It was clear to him that she possessed none. On every visit she had worn the same old filthy clothes. Sullivan sat at his desk and consulted his book, not that he had to, he knew the exact amount owing.

“You now owe fourteen shillings Mrs Streetwater, do you have this weeks payment?”

she said nothing.

“Well I’m waiting.” he sneered.

“No, Sir. I don’t.”

“Well. What am I going to do with you?”

again she remained silent. She had heard the tales of his late payers, some were never seen again.

“Well?” he shouted at her.

“Sorry Sir, it was my youngest, Albert, I had to take him to the doc’s. his breathing was...”

Sullivan interrupted her, “I’m not interested in your petty domestic affairs,” he yelled, “But, I am not a monster despite what some people say, you have until next week. Two weeks owing next week or I will not be so understanding.”

“Thank you Sir.” She turned towards the door.

Sullivan jumped out of his chair and opened it for her.

She passed through the door, her body as stiff and tense as a stone column, she was still afraid of what he could do to her before she made it out of the front door. He watched her closely as she passed him then slowly descend down the stairs. As she opened the front door onto the street she breathed again, then

out of the corner of her eye she caught sight of something that made her run out of the house in blind terror.

At the bottom of the stairs there was an internal door. It had swung open and there standing in the kitchen was a dwarf of a man wearing a blood stained overall while in his hand he carried a meat cleaver. A disfiguring scar ran down the left hand side of his face, from the forehead down over the eye stopping at the line of the jaw bone. He smiled at the women's response, stepping out into the hall he closed the front door.

"Be ready, soon." said his master's voice from the top of the stairs, "It'll be the next one in, with a bit a luck."

Accompanied by a laugh the dwarf disappeared back into the kitchen.

In the street outside the white stone house, a one armed man paused at the door. He took one last drag on his cigarette, flicked the stub into the road's central gutter before looking round. After that final turn of his head he opened the door and entered the house.

Slowly he climbed the stairway. Half way up he felt a pressure building on his chest, cold engulfed him. He felt cold now and his legs wouldn't go another step upward, it was as though an invisible force was trying to stop him going any further.

Since he had returned from military service he had heard voices in his head, but never had he experienced something as strange as this.

"Go, go back." said a voice deep inside his head, "Heed my words, for I am Ian Foreman." it continued.

The voices had started again, his head hurt, something inside his skull was beating like hammer on anvil.

Composing himself he continued up the stairs and once at the top knocked on the door. With a creak the door opened. "Mr Jackson, come in." as the ex-army man passed through into the room his wake omitted a smell which the nostrils of Sullivan picked up at once, though he didn't mention it, not yet. Slowly he returned to his seat and consulted his book, "Now let me see."

Ben Jackson looked at the floor as Sullivan read out his notes, "You borrowed three guineas' one month ago. This was to procure lodgings for yourself and 'tide' you over while you sort out employment, is that correct?"

Silence was Jackson's only reply.

"Since then I have not seen a penny piece of my moneys in return. Do you have employment sir?"

Again Jackson said nothing.

"Well?" Sullivan raised his voice.

"No, Sir. I have not, I have only had enough money to eat the mallest amounts of scraps."

"Really. It would appear that you have enough sir to purchase smoking tobacco and matches. Is this a justified use for my money?"

"No Sir."

"The loan is called in Sir, you will have the money to me by the end of the day."

"That's impossible Sir, I need more time to find a..."

"I have given plenty of time due to your being one of Her Majesties men at Arms. Normally I would take action after only one missed payment, you have had three Sir, three."

"I will try Sir, tonight, I will have it."

"Very well." Agreed Sullivan.

"By the way," Ben was pushing his luck, but for his own sake he had to know. He asked the question that to him seemed more important then the money owed, "Who is Ian Foreman?"

"Foreman, what makes you ask that? Sullivan asked.

"It was just a name that I heard."

"He was a man who couldn't pay his debts." Sullivan replied in an off hand tone. He crossed over to the door and opened it for Jackson, "Tonight, no later then six o'clock."

As Jackson passed, Sullivan lifted up a walking stick from the stand next to the door. This particular stick was only used for special purposes as it was weighted with a lead insert. Raising it above his head to achieve maximum velocity he brought it down on the back of Jackson's neck.

Jackson lost consciousness as soon as the contact was made. His limp body rolled down the stairs landing at the bottom in a twisted heap. The interior door to the kitchen opened. There in the doorway, cleaver in hand stood the dwarf, an acidic smile on his face.

The smile turned to a look of determination as he brought the cleaver down shearing Jackson's head from his body.

"Clean that up, then make the usual arrangements." Sullivan ordered the little man. He returned to his office where he sat down at the desk and began to count the days takings. The interest from his loans plus the trade with the local research hospital was reaping in quite a tidy sum. If his clients couldn't pay with money then the sale of their cadaver more than covered the amounts of the loan.

At six thirty he had finished for the day. As he placed the pile of bills and coins into the safe he began to feel uneasy. A sense of being watched came over him, a rubbing sound was coming from the door to the stairs. Slowly he crossed the room as quickly as he could then opened the door. No one was there. It was dark now, he closed and locked the safe then lit a candle. After extinguishing the gas lamp he set off down the stairway, the candle in his hand lighting the way.

Half way down the stairs the flame blew out. This left him in almost total darkness. He took out the box of matches from his pocket and struck one of them. The flame was warm, he could feel the heat on his face, lighting the candle once more he took another step down the stairs, then stopped.

What he thought was approximately seven steps down at the bottom of the stairway he could see the figure of a man looking up at him. The flame from the candle was obscuring his view, so he moved it to one side.

"Who is it, who's there?" he asked, but no one answered his call.

Each time he took a step down the figure moved down a step too. After four or five times he realised that he should have been at the bottom of the stairway, but he wasn't. It went on.

Turning to face upward back toward his office he not longer could see his office door, only stairs. Turning back to face the apparition he stared at the almost translucent figure, "I know you." he said walking down the stairs toward it. "I know you, you're that no good Ian Foreman." then it dawned on him, Foreman had been one of his victims, Ian Foreman was dead, murdered by him and his cook.

The spectre smiled at Sullivan then slowly disappeared leaving him there. He ran down toward the front door, but it never came. On and on he went until he was out of breath.

He sat down on the stairs his head in his hands, that candle beside him, the stairs with no end or beginning, no top or bottom.

FINI

The Beachcomber

A cold sea mist blew over the rippled wet sand of Flambra Beach. The strip of sandy beach was enclosed between the crashing sea and the sheer cliffs of Flambra Head. The cliffs were riddled with a network of caves naturally formed by the sea over the last hundred thousand years. Only one path led down to the beach and it was wise not to stray too far from it. The sea could easily and quickly cut any inexperienced person off from the only safe escape route. Many souls over the years had perished in this way.

The cave system, so it was said by locals were haunted by the ghosts of pirates trapped and washed out to by the sea.

A sole figure walked alone the beach that cold morning, on his head a pair of headphones, in his hand a metal detector.

John Smith came to the beach most days, for years the stories had been told of long lost treasure washed up on this part of the coast, he wanted to be rich, but he wasn't the sort of man who particular wanted to work and earn his money.

Each time the electronic beep sounded his trowel would furiously dig up the sand, the usual results would be no more then a piece of twisted old metal rusted off of a boat or packing crate. The occasional coin would manifest itself, but never anything more. After one such disappointing find he sighed and looked around. To his right the sea crashed down on the sand and to his left the cliffs rose up into the overcast sky. He was cold and had had enough for today.

If John Smith had have stood on that very spot almost exactly two hundred and fifty years previous a magnificent sight would have met his eyes. A three masted sailing ship hugged the coast line sailing south along the East Coast. The sails were taken in as it prepared to drop anchor off the Flambra coast. Its illegal cargo was being readied to be transported ashore and hidden in one of the many cave which served as a bolt hole for the privateers.

The assembled bags and chest of coins were safely secured into the rowing boat when the lookouts voice bellowed, "Gun ship astern."

The crew that remained aboard jumped into action. The cannon were manoeuvred to the correct angle and pitch, but as the Master at Arms drew in a breath to shout 'fire' the Royal Naval gun ship let off a salvo at the pirates.

The Naval gunners knew their trade well, several balls found their mark. "Return fire." Bellowed Captain Jonathan Price. He stood on the poop deck at the rear of the vessel looking down on his crew, a crew of thieves and cut throats. they were not organised, not sailors. Eventually four cannon fired, their shots well off mark.

Another salvo came in from the damned Navy. The Mizzen mast took a direct hit. With a creek and grown the upper half of it broke off, just above the main sail.

"Look out Captain." Shouted a voice as a screaming man fell off of the falling jib into the sea.

Price looked skyward to see the mast falling toward him, quickly he jumped out of the way, but not quick enough. The mast caught his leg, pinning him down on the deck. He was in agony, the lower half of his right leg had shattered. Just before he past out he could see a small rowing boat making for the shore, "Go on lads." He tried to speak, but couldn't. as his eyes closed the small rowing boat took a direct hit, blowing it out of the water. "I swear no one will have it."

John took off his head set and made for the cliff path, time to go home. A shrill screech emanated from his head set stopped him dead in his tracks. It was fortunate that he wasn't wearing the equipment, the noise would have probably deafened him. The metal detector must have picked something up. Judging by the intensity of then tone it was something big. He moved the metal detector over the area, as he thought it was big.

With his trowel furiously he dug. The metal blade of the tool hit something hard. Scraping the sand off the surface he could see

wooden planks bonded together and, yes straps of riveted brass holding them in place.

Such was his concentration on the discovery of the chest he failed to see a figure way off down the beech watching him. The silhouetted figure stood as steady as a rock , how he kept such a good balance was a mystery as the lower half of his right leg appeared to be missing.

Agony ripped through prices leg as he regained consciousness. He opened his eyes to see unfamiliar surroundings. He was in a room, but alive. Stabs of pain shot up from the lower part of his right leg. Instinctively he tried to sit up from his laying position and grab that part of his anatomy to offer it some kind of comfort.

He couldn't sit up. He was tied down to the bed on which he lay, restrained like a wild animal.

The only part of his body he could move was his head, that at least was not restrained. Looking down his body he could see the source of the pain. The lower half of his right leg was missing, amputated just below the knee joint. Around the stump of the leg was wound a white bandage, most of it coloured red were his own blood had stained it.

Where was he and what had happened to his ship and crew? Most important of all, what had happened to the chest of gold coins, where was that?

By the door of the small room stood a red jacketed army private, standing as ease, on guard. He couldn't be guarding against an escape attempt from Price, even if he could liberate himself from his bonds and overpower the guard, how would he walk out with half a leg missing. He must be there then to stop anyone from entering, was his crew going to mount a rescue attempt? Were his crew at liberty, were they alive?

A knock came from the door. The guard turned and looked through the observation hole. The sentry saluted a sharp recognition as an officer entered and positioned himself at the end of the bed. "There's a crowd outside Price, shouting for

your release. We are popular aren't we. They are calling you the new Robin Hood?

"Why don't you listen to them and do as they bid?" Price said through gritted teeth. The pain was so great he could hardly speak.

The officer smiled at him, "Because your nothing but a common criminal, and your going to hang."

The following morning John Smith took the 8A bus into the town. Hornsea was a small seaside town on the Yorkshire coast, modest in many ways. Its beach, amusements and town centre all small and rather understated.

Getting off the bus in the main street that ran through the town, John found the shop he was looking for. The doorway was not one he had passed through before. The neighbouring betting offices and fish and chip shops were more his normal haunts.

The owner of the antiques shop watched him enter. Immediately the small bow tied proprietor eyed him with suspicion. The scruffy unshaven man was not his normal clientele and as he entered the aroma of stale beer and cigarettes accompanied him.

"Can I help you?" asked the shop owner. If this unwanted visitor must come into the shop he wanted him where he could be seen at all times.

"Yes," said John unsure of himself, "I need your help." From his pocket he took out a white handkerchief. Placing it on the glass topped counter slowly he began to unfold it.

the shop keeper watched his large thick fingers unfolding the piece of cloth, ground in dirt highlighted the cracks and cuts in his hands while his finger nails were black with ingrained dirt.

His opinion of the visitor suddenly changed, as the last fold of white linen was taken off he saw the sparkle of gold.

A golden coin.

He was no expert on coins, but he took a close look at the disk with his magnifying glass. His heart started to race and his breath started to falter, "My God?"

"Is it worth anything?" John asked, it must be to have evoked such a reaction from this little man behind the counter.

“Where did you get it?” suspicion had entered his head, had he stolen it, he had heard no reports of a coin robbery. News such as that soon got around the antiques world, if any stolen gods came onto the market the thief’s could easily be traced.

“I found I , on the beach.” He didn’t mention his metal detector. The law was complicated when it came to such things, best not to say.

The shop owner picked up the coin and took a closer look. As he did so he shivered with excitement. Out of the corner of his eye he caught sight of someone looking into the shop window. When he turned to look the figure was not looking into the shop but was on the other side of the street. It was difficult to make out who it was, the sun was behind him silhouetting the onlooker.

“Well?” asked John excitement in his voice.

“If this is what I think it is, it could be worth anything up to five thousand pounds. Do you have anymore?”

John couldn’t speak. Shock had paralysed his motor functions. He heard himself utter the words, “One or two.” In fact it was probably more like one or two thousand.

He left the shop not knowing what to do. After walking three doors down the road he entered another establishment, one that he frequented on a regular basis, The Dog and Duck.

A crowd had gathered outside York assizes for the announcement of the verdict on the peoples champion. A quiet hum of anticipation circled around the crowd.

Inside the halls of justice Jonathan Price stood accused in the dock, a crotch under his right arm supported his right hand side.

The list of charges were long and numerous, most of them were at least based on fact, but several were an invention of the crown or committed by other parties, he of course denied all charges. What else could he do? The verdict of the Justice Thomas was never in question, before the trial began all knew of his guilt. When His Lordship donned the black cap no one gasped in surprise, least of all Price himself.

The sentence was also another foregone conclusion, to be hung from the neck until dead.

The prisoner was taken away.

A hardly recognisable John Smith stood at the back of Sutherbys Auction House, London. It was the first time in his life he had worn a suit, his clean shaven and tidy appearance was now going to be the norm.

His treasure trove had an estimated value of 1.5 million pounds and the bidding was fast approaching that mark. The room was full, standing room only, whether the assembled masses were bidding or just onlookers John couldn't tell. The event had even attracted media interest. A crew from the BBC news were present to record the proceedings. The bidding past its estimated price and raced onto the two million mark, then one of the bidders dropped out.

Two million was a fair price he was happy with that, then as the auctioneer called, "Going, twice..." a nod came from one of the line of men cradling telephones next to their ears.

The bidding was going again.

The three million mark was past, then four, five, six. Eventually the bidding stopped at six and a half million.

Jubilantly John strode up the centre aisle of the auction room to everyone's applause. At the front he shook hands with the auctioneer, thanking him whole heartily for handling the sale.

As he turned to take the applause and leave the sale room he saw framed in the double doors at the rear of the room a silhouetted black figure, the bottom half of his right leg missing. The sight made him stop and think for a moment, where had he seen him before. He smiled at the bidders in the room, looking around at their happy faces, then turning back to the door whoever it was had now gone. The doorway was empty.

The Nasmire was a large expanse of open land on the outskirts of York. From first light the crowds had started to gather. The centre point to the gathering was a large old oak tree. Over the

many hundreds of years it had stood there, it must have seen many events in its life time, but none as gruesome as its latest purpose.

An open topped cart trundled across the land pulled by a single horse. Standing in the back hands tied together was the figure of Jonathan Price. He saw the crowd waiting his presence, waiting for the show to begin.

Under the tree was erected a temporary platform, two steps leading up to it. the cart came to a rest along side of it. as it drew up a rope was thrown around one of the large thick branches of the tree.

Price was led up onto the temporary gallows. Defiantly he smiled at the crowd who cheered his name, at least he was dying a hero and would not disappoint. The noose was put around his neck, then it was all over.

His body fell. The neck snapped, Jonathan Price, Pirate, thief, hero was dead.

Over the last few days John Smith had been in the company of a team of documentary makers. The program being filmed was part of a series on treasure seekers, the first program was about the biggest treasure haul ever made in this country. Several locations had been visited during the filming and now on the final day the crew had arrived in York.

A mock up of the hanging of Jonathan Price was scheduled to be the final piece of filming.

The gallows were erected before the camera, sound and make up crews arrived at the location. The director sat in his chair and took a look at the monitors showing each camera picture.

The first shot was of the actor playing Price dismounting the cart. The second and final shot was of the hanging body.

“Where’s the body?” someone shouted. A flurry of activity ensued. The camera men lined up the shot as the director made several points of fine tuning. “What’s that?” he bellowed. On the monitor he could see the black outline of a man standing away in the distance directly behind the shot, a one legged man.

The director stood up looking over the bank of TV screens, "You there, bugger off." He shouted over the field.

One or two of the crew turned to see who he was shouting at. No one was around,, not to be seen in any case.

The director felt somewhat of a fool as he stared into space. He looked back at the monitor, the screen was blank. He sat back in his chair and picked up his plastic cup filled with hot coffee.

A crew member had found the manikin dummy of the famous pirate and was putting its head into the noose.

"Right, lets get it up there then." The director was getting impatient.

As someone pulled on the rope the director watched the process on the monitor.

"Hold it there." He ordered. The legs were framed on the screen, "Perfect." Then the figure was back. "What?" he yelled, "Who is that? They're ruining my shot."

again he jumped up out of his chair and drew in a large lung full of air ready to bellow at the intruder. Then words never came out of his mouth. The figure was gone again, a shiver ran down the back of his neck, was someone playing a joke on him.

He looked at the legs hanging down from the tree, "For Gods sake?" he said out loud, "Who was responsible for making the manikin?" whoever it was would be getting a rocket up their backside, Jonathon Price had the right leg cut off at the knee, this dummy had two full legs.

Slowly he looked up the torso of the hanging body. It swung slightly as it hung down from the branch, then he realised. The figure hanging down was not the mock up body of Jonathon Price, but the face looking down on him was the agonisingly twisted face of John Smith.

FINI

The Walled Up Room.

In many ways haunting's are inflicted on innocent people through nothing more than coincidence, begin in the wrong place at the wrong time. Even something as innocent as decorating could ignite a tortured spirit into returning to where they once walked the living world.

The gravel drive crunched under the weight of the white transit van as it drew up outside the large detached house. Adorned on the side panels of the van was the printed legend 'A.D. Macdonald Builders'.

Mr Macdonald sat in the drivers seat, "here we are then." He said to his apprentice. Adrian Macdonald was a man in his late forties and prematurely grey. He enjoyed working in these big houses, it was a glimpse into how the other half live. His many years of experience he had also learnt on the whole that the wives of these rich households were not adverse to a dalliance with a bit of rough like himself. Many a bored housewife had accidentally walked in on him wearing nothing but a towel or dressing gown, and after the usual silver tongued repartee the inevitable would happen.

McDonalds hopes on this job though would be dashed. The lady of the house was a young good looking girl in her mid twenties, far too young for someone of his age to make any kind of move on.

"Bloody Hell?" said Andrew his apprentice looking at the house, "these must be rich?"

"Ey lad," said the older mentor, "We'll do alright out of this job."

Twenty minutes after their arrival the two artisans stood in the large kitchen, both of them holding a hot steaming mug of tea in their hands.

The man of the house Douglas Robinson was giving the two workmen the run down of the job in hand. His young wife, Kylie, twenty years his junior stood by his side. It was her who had decided that she wanted a new kitchen. The whole lot had to

come out, a wall knocked through into the old outhouse and a new kitchen fitted.

Ady's eyes lit up, the kitchen currently in residence was hardly a year old. The hob by the look of it had never been used. The glass fronted oven door had not a mark on it. no doubt they ate out most nights. With a little care this kitchen could be removed and sold on at a profit, this job he would enjoy.

The removal of the units and appliances took all but a day, each piece carefully packed in bubble wrap and placed in the van.

The next morning the builders were at the house at nine sharp. The kitchen became a no go area as the sledge hammers and bolster chisels came out. The wall between kitchen and out house was coming down after finishing their second cup of tea Ady and Andrew donned their protective equipment, hats masks and goggles before taking the heavy shifting gear to the wall.

On the first strike the old plaster shattered, shooting in all directions like shrapnel from a bomb blast.

Several strikes later a layer of dust covered both the kitchen and both of the builders.

The heavy head of the sledge hammer impacted once more with the wall. two bricks disappeared in the darkness beyond the other side.

As the dust settled Ady looked in the newly formed hole. Through the dust covered goggles he couldn't see a thing in the darkness, removing them to obtain a better look.

Peering into the hole he could see nothing. No light was shining into the outhouse, that was strange. He looked out of the kitchen window, the outhouse door was open. Some natural light should have been finding its way in from somewhere, Go and have a look in that door, "ha said gesturing toward the outhouse door, "See were we've come though."

Andrew, grateful for a breath of fresh air went out into the garden and disappeared through he green door.

"Can ya see anything?" Ady shouted out to his mate.

"No." came the muffled response.

What was he talking about. He had to have a look for himself.

Andrew had been right, no hole in the outhouse wall, “It must be a double course.”

Back in the kitchen Ady took a black rubber torch out of his tool box, turned it on and shone it into the newly formed hole. He needed to know the distance between the bricks, it could alter the kitchen's dimensions, something he hoped would not be the case. At worst it could rest in the surveyors being called back in.

The beam of light shone into the dusty darkness. A smell filtered out of the hole. It was a putrid smell of something rotten. The beam shone about three feet before it hit the second wall. “Strange?” a three foot square room? “waste of space.” He muttered to himself.

There was nothing to be seen.

Andrew came back into the house from the garden, that sun was out now, he felt a definite chill in the room as he returned. Must be all the bare brick, it always made a room feel colder than it was.

“Ah you are here then.” He said with a hint of sarcasm in his voice, “Come on let's get then.” Andrew picked up his own hammer. “Have you just come in?”

“What?” Andrew asked.

“From outside, have you just come back in from the outhouse?”

“Yer, why?”

“Oh I could swear you were stood behind me.”

“No.”

The destruction continued.

Moments later the sun shone bright rays of light into the room illuminating the clouds of dust and also the ever growing hole in the wall. Andrew took another swing on his heavy hammer. The whole of the left side of the wall collapsed into a pile of bricks on the floor. Both men jumped back to avoid the falling masonry. Clouds of dust filled the air penetrating the paper dust masks that protected their lungs. Andrew erupted into a fit of coughing almost bending him double. He held onto the door frame for support as he continued to bark.

Slowly he stood up, fanning the dust cloud away he looked into the hole where the bricks had up until then lay.

“Jesus, Christ?” he shouted, as he looked into the hole now illuminated by sunlight he saw a skull looking back at him. Not only a skull though, a whole skeleton sat leaning up against the side wall.

three weeks later the two builders were gone. Kylie had here new kitchen, Douglas was happy because once again he was not only keeping up with the Jones’s, but well ahead of them.

It was a warm summer night, the couple had invited two other couples around for an evening of drinks and dinner, and of course an opportunity to show off their new state of the art kitchen.

The newly decorated room was still in a the spotless pristine condition as it had been left by the cleaner that had come in the liberate the room from the builders destruction. ‘Who was cooking tonight’s meal then?’ thought more then ones of the arriving guests. In fact the catering was being delivered, Kylie had commented earlier that evening to one guest, “How can I enjoy myself while cooking all night?”

Once everyone had arrived Douglas just happened to mention about taking the drinks out into the garden, unavoidably taking them all through the kitchen. Once in that room the gusts were treated to guided tour. All stood there while Douglas told them of the cost of everything, and then the final gloat, the story of the gruesome discovery of the bricked up body behind the wall.

“Where is now?” asked Edward. Edward was Douglas’s boss. He was a man in his eighties now, though anyone meeting him for the first time would not put him down as past fifty.

“Once the Police had been and had a look the medical research students came in from the University. They took the bones away to run tests and research the age.”

“So, where was it then?” it was Emma, a friend of Kyle’s who had asked, purely from morbid curiosity.

“Just here,” demonstrated Kylie pointing under the breakfast bar.

“Does it haunt the house then?” Emma asked excitedly.

“Well...” began Kylie, but Douglas who didn’t like the subject of ghosts interrupted her.

“No, no it doesn’t.”

With a chuckle of laughter the party passed out into the garden to enjoy the evening sun. Kylie held her school friend back for a moment grabbing her by the arm as she followed the other out.

“It does.” she said quietly.

“What?”

“It comes back and moves things. Doug says I’m imagining things, but I’m not.”

“What does it do?”

“I’ll show you. Give me your wine glass.”

She placed both her own and Emma’s glass on the black marble breakfast bar. From a cupboard Kylie took a bag of flour and lightly dusted a thin layer of powder around the glasses. “Now we just have to wait. Grab another glass of wine.”

Kylie and Emma each holding a freshly filled glass each joined the others in the garden, leaving the kitchen empty, almost empty.

At eight o’clock the dinner was delivered, but nine thirty the meal was over and the bottles of wine on the dining table were empty.

“Would anyone like more wine?” asked Kylie playing the ideal hostess. Douglas did, “Emma, would you like to give me a hand, in the kitchen?”

It took Emma a second to take the hint, but then she suddenly remembered the experiment they had arranged earlier in the evening. “O“, yes of course.” She said enthusiastically quickly following Kylie out of the room.

Slowly the two women entered the darkened room. By this point both women had forgotten about the trip to collect more wine and had only one thing on their mind. Kylie switched on the light ‘click’. Turning the corner Kylie smiled to herself, she had been proven right. It hadn’t been the most scientific experiment ever undertaken, but it had worked, Kylie was jubilant, Emma on the other hand felt faint.

Both glasses had moved at least half an inch. A crescent of undusted worktop was visible next to the base of each glass. It appeared that both glasses had been dragged along the surface about a quarter of an inch.

"There you see, I told you. Sometimes things fall off the end, I hear them crash on the floor. The ghost can't have been feeling very energetic tonight though."

Emma couldn't speak. Her mouth hung wide open in amazement.

By the time the two women returned from the kitchen the rest of the guests had seated themselves in the living room. The room was quiet dark with books lining two of the walls from floor to ceiling.

"Are you alright Emma?" John her boyfriend asked as she appeared back in the room. "You're as white as a sheet."

"It was the ghost." Kylie announced to the room, the comment was much to her husband's annoyance.

"How many times do I have to tell you, there's no such thing as..."

"Oh yes there is." Interrupted Emma.

A sudden tension had entered the air of the room, Edwards wife Margaret could feel it and decided it was time to exercise these ghosts. She had hardly spoke for most of the night, it was as though that something else preoccupied her thoughts all evening, now though she unleashed her wisdom on them.

"There is one here." She said.

Everyone looked around at her almost in shock as such a quiet woman could talk with such force and authority.

"I have felt the presence here since I arrived earlier tonight."

"Are you a medium?" asked Kylie.

"I am." she said, Edward remained silent. He like his old friend didn't hold with such practices, not only were they unholy, but the product of a deranged mind. That was his opinion.

The two young women held a different view and were both thrilled with the prospect of having a real medium in the house with them. Emma asked the question Margaret knew was coming, it always did.

“Can we have a seance?”

“Of course we can.” she replied in a calm friendly voice.

“Do we have to sit in a circle and link hands or something?” Kyle asked.

“No. we don’t do that sort of thing anymore, well only in the theatre and that’s just for effect.” She said with a smile.

“Come on everybody, lets do one.” Kylie invited everyone to join in. Douglas and Edward who were sitting closest to the fire shook their heads defiantly, such things did not amuse them.

Strangely enough the fire was on. No extra heat was required, this after all was the middle of summer, but Douglas had paid a lot of money for a fire that simulated a flame effect without producing any heat and on a night it was always on.

Emma, Kylie and Emmas' boyfriend Paul each pulled up a chair and sat in a rough arch around Margaret. “oh hang on,” said Kylie jumping up and turning the lights off.

Margaret sat in a high backed armchair, she closed her eyes and prepared herself to transgress to the other side. The flickering fire light danced on her face. That was the only illumination in the room giving her an almost devilish appearance. She took in a large breath then began to speak, “I can feel two spirits present in the room.”

“Two?” Kylie said shocked.

“one is old, she had been here many years. Murder. She was murdered. Pain I can feel pain, starvation.

She was walled up, why?” a tear had started to roll down Margaret’s cheek. Was she really feeling the pain of murder victim?

“Who was she?” asked Emma.

“A servant girl, she was, oh no, she was pregnant with the Masters child. He had her walled up. She is still in pain, I can feel it.

I don’t understand, she’s been here for many years, but she’s only just arrived. I don’t understand?”

Kylie did, “She was trapped in the walled up room the builders found. Knocking the wall down must have realised her.”

“That would make sense.” agreed Margaret. “The other has just arrived, I can’t see them though, not yet. I don’t think the spirit body has had chance to form yet.” She fell silent for a minute before continuing, “Do you want to leave this place?”

she must know be talking to the spirit the others thought, “Then move towards the light, do you see it, do you? Can you see it, yea that’s it, move toward it and you’ll leave this place. Both of you yes if you wish.”

“Edward,” Douglas began to talk, he was silenced by his young wife.

“Shh,” she said abruptly.

Margaret relaxed her body, sitting back in the chair. She bore a happy smile on her face, it was the greatest gift of a medium to help a poor lost soul into the light, tonight she had the pleasure of assisting two such wanderers in eternity. Opening her eyes she looked around, “There, they’ve gone.”

“Who was the second spirit?” Paul asked.

“I don’t know, some other poor lost soul.”

It was all over, Kylie turned on the lights.

Douglas took a drink of his claret and glanced across at his old friend, “Edward, do you...” he came to a halt mid sentence. Edward was staring into space, his glass of red wine had fallen from his hand and rested on his lap, a scarlet stain on the lap and thighs of his tweed suit.

“Edward?” Douglas repeated in a raised voice. the urgency in his voice instantly attracted the others attentions. Douglas jumped up out of his seat and knelt down beside Edward. Putting his fingers around his wrist he searched for a pulse, none could be found.

Edward was dead.

He had passed over to the other side only a minute or so earlier.

FINI

Cries From the Deep.

Wilson Maxwell was not a great sailor, the slightest motion of the ship left him the feeling of having had his stomach transplanted.

The stars shone in the clear night sky, the moon reflected in the still ocean, the Atlantic that night looked like a millpond, how calm everything was tonight. This did not do anything for his feelings of nausea though. He was en route from Southampton to New York for the press release of his latest book 'A Stitch in Time.' Wilson Maxwell was a writer of crime fiction and he was one of the best in his field.

His publisher thought him a great asset to the company, was that why they had paid for him to travel to New York in the luxury of the Queen Mary II at great expense, or was it because he was late handing in the first draft of his next masterpiece? Had he been isolated on a ship for two and a half weeks to finish his works? If that was the case then the deep thinking ones at Hargreaves Press House would be disappointed, he couldn't concentrate on a ship, his laptop would remain unopened for the rest of the journey. Thankfully he was flying back to England.

Wilson stood on the forward observation deck, this privilege was reserved for first class passengers only, he really should be grateful to be here, it was just ships, he didn't like them.

As he stared into the inky blackness of the night he tried to distinguish where the line of the horizon was, but it was just black on black. Then out of the corner of his eye a flash of light caught his attention. A bright streak of white light shot across the sky, a shooting star? It must have been. He waited a few more moments to see if he could see any more. He patients were rewarded, he did see another, but it wasn't a shooting star as he had first thought. The ribbon of light came up from behind the horizon only to turn back on itself and fall back into the blackness again.

So, he had found the line of the horizon. His mind started to think about the display of pyrotechnics showing itself from the over the horizon, maybe it was a birthday celebration or a

wedding party. As he turn to return to his cabin he wondered if the party revellers were enjoying themselves then he was on this magnificent liner, the answer he thought must be yes.

It was now three o'clock in the morning and quite cold even though it was the middle of summer. One of the many night shift stewards passed him as he left the observation deck.

"Good evening Sir." The steward said in a cheerful voice. Far too cheerful for Wilson at that time of night.

"Evening, did you see the fireworks over there a minute ago?" he asked the crewmember. . Maybe it was his lack of sleep, but now he was doubting whether he himself has seen them.

"I didn't Sir no." a grave tone had now suddenly entered his voice, "What did these fireworks look like Sir?"

"Well, I don't know really, just rockets really."

"Would you come with me for moment Sir?"

Wilson was curious, what had he said to cause such a reaction? The steward led him through a door marked private. The corridor now entered was not designed in the palatial style, as were the public areas of the ship.

Quickly they walked along the corridor before coming to another door. Passing through it both men climbed up the flight of stairs. At the top of the stairs was a door marked, 'Strictly No Access'. The steward opened it and ushered Wilson through.

He could not believe his eyes. He was standing on the bridge of one of the biggest liners in the world.

The night watch all turned their collective faces to see who the new comer was. It wasn't uncommon for the Captain or first mate to make an appearance in the early hours to see how the ship was operating.

Wilson suddenly realised the man he thought was a steward was actually an officer, a point confirmed by the bridge crew standing to attention on their arrival.

"This gentleman had reported seeing flares of the port bow, Mr Parker, check the radar, Mr Fossley check all communication channels, someone inform the Captain."

The bridge crew came alive, each man a professional in his own field. The radio operator had donned a set of headphones and

was sweeping the airwave on his brand new digital radio, the radar operator scanned the sea area for any sign of other craft.

"Captain Chambers," said one of the voices on the bridge, "Your presence is required urgently on the bridge Sir."

The radar operator removed his headphones, "Mr Smith," he was addressing Wilson companion, "All I am getting is an old fashion SOS repeating, no voice contact as yet."

Smith gave him an order, "Reply to it, in voice and Morse, Tell them we are on our way with assistance." As he spoke Mr Fossley sent his message as instructed, Smith turned his attention to the radar operator, "Mr Parker, do we have a position?"

"Not as yet Sir, nothing is showing on the screen."

"Lets hope to God we're not too late."

Outside in the cold night air another flare lit up the sky.

If there was a ship in peril here in the middle of the Atlantic it was a thousand to one chance that another craft would be close enough to give assistance, tonight though was one of those occasions. The Queen Mary II steamed toward the explosions of light, a cry for help in the darkness.

The door opened onto the bridge, framed within it stood Captain Chambers, a large framed bearded man, his uniform immaculate, not a crease to be seen in any part of the white fabric. "What is the problem Mr Smith?"

His voice was full of authority, the entire bridge crew stood to attention on hearing his distinctive voice.

Smith explained to the Captain the events of the previous fifteen minutes.

"Have we had any voice contact?" asked Chambers.

"No Sir, just an SOS."

"Do we have a fix on the position?"

"Er no Sir." Smith sounded somewhat embarrassed by his lack of information. "We cannot find a trace on the radar Sir. The only point of reference we have are the flares."

"And you sir," the Captain said turning toward Wilson. "You saw the flares?"

"Yes, that's right."

“Do I know you?” the Captain asked staring at him. He has seen his face before, but where from?

“Wilson Maxwell Sir, I...”

“Of course, my wife’s favourite author. You must have dinner with us tonight.”

“Thank you, I’d be honoured.”

“Now back to the business in hand. Mr Smith, what’s the current situation?”

Smith was bent over the radar and satellite tracking machines. He and the operator were deep in conversation, “I don’t understand it Sir, we should be almost on top of it by now.”

The sky outside was now beginning to lighten now. The clouds were deep shades of red and orange, the first mate took a pair of binoculars off of a hook and scanned the ocean. Nothing was in sight.

“You won’t see anything.” Captain Chambers said in a melancholy tone, we’re too late, eighty years too late.” He turned to leave. As he opened the door he spoke for the last time, “Don’t forget dinner tonight Mr Maxwell.” With that the door closed and he was gone.

A sombre mood had fallen on the occupants of the bridge, no one mentioned the Captains strange comment.

“Resume course for New York.” Smith ordered. Without a word the wheel man turn the small wheel and the ship continued on its way.

Two days later the Queen Mary II arrived in New York dock. The decks and quayside were full of cheering crowds. Wilson was one of the first off the ship, he was desperate to get back onto terra firma.

After checking into the Drake Hotel he took a trip to the offices of the New York Times and requested to look at the archive section.

He had not been able to take to the Captain the previous night at dinner, he was placed on the other side of the table sitting next to the Captains wife. He was desperate to find out what the Captain had referring to as he left the bridge early that morning.

He now sat behind a microfilm reader and sorted through a box full of reels of film. He found the year he was looking for and loaded the machine. The film flashed past his eyes on the screen, it took only a matter of minutes to find the edition of The Times published on the 23 July 1925, almost eighty years ago to the day.

A chill came over him as he looked at a picture of a ship and read the headline above...

‘ALL HANDS LOST AS SS GLORIA SINKS’

The Erroneous Judgement

“This story was inspired by a wet day on Lindisfarne, somewhere I suggest you do not visit in the rain”

NW.

The island of Lindisfarne on the Northumberland coast has over the years been the sauce of many stories regarding the supernatural. It's history is littered with tales of monks from the priory dying in unnatural circumstances, strange goings on in the castle and the loss of sailors from the small fleet of crab catchers being lost at sea.

Nobby Harper sat in the dinning room of the small bed and breakfast, in front of him sat a plate containing a full English breakfast. The fare was that plentiful that the bacon teetered on the edge of the plate almost falling onto the white table cloth. The smell of the cooked breakfast reminded him that he was on home turf. He had recently returned home from the Great War and had tried to forget the nightmarish events that he had experienced in the trenches of France, this trip he hoped would put a closure to that particular part of his life.

“You here on holiday then?” asked the landlord of the B&B as he carried in a toast rack filling the room with the smell of warm toast.

“Sort of.” Nobby replied. “I’m here to visit someone.” He didn’t want to be drawn into a conversation on why he was here, it was too much a personal matter.

He wasn’t sure why but he had to see his old commanding officers grave, make sure he was dead.

As the landlord, a large wild haired man, probably an ex-fisherman Nobby thought, put the toast down on the table he paused before returning to his vertical stance. His attention was drawn by the regimental badge on Nobbys' tie. It was the

emblem of the local regiment, the Lindisfarne Fusiliers. You were in the Fusiliers I see.” said the landlord looking down on the seated guest.

“Yes I, that was my regiment.”

“You knew Captain Armstrong then?”

“Oh yes, he was my commanding officer.”

“You’ll know all about how he was killed then?”

“Not really, as far as I know, he was killed by a sniper, taken out while lighting a cigarette.”

“There was an official inquire you know.” The landlord said in a stern voice.

“We only heard whispers. You don’t know how it was in the trenches. It was cold, wet, we were never told anything of what was happening in the outside world. People would leave to fetch supplies and we would never see them again, hit by a shell whilst working their way back from the front.” He paused for moment before continuing, “It was the worst place on Earth, if you avoided the bullets chances were that you would go mad with the continues firing of the guns, you can’t imagine what it was like.” Nobby stared into space as he remembered the terrible ordeals in he trenches.

The landlord felt a twinge of guilt at using such a sharp tone on the veteran, “It’s just that Arthur was well liked here on the island. Rumour was that his wounds could not have been caused by any German sniper, he was shot three times in the stomach, the inquest found that the bullets taken out of him were from a British pistol.

He came back a hero, but a dead hero is no good to anyone.”

Nobby slowly nodded his head in silent reflection, “That’s why I’m here, to visit his grave.”

In the kitchen the landlady was closing the lid on Nobbys packed lunch. She listened to the conversation between her husband and paying guest with some interest. She had known Arthur Armstrong since he was a babe in arms and she had been hurt more then most on hearing of his death.

She carried the tin box out into the dinning room and carefully placed it next to the now half empty breakfast plate. "You knew the late Captain then?"

"Yes, I was just telling your husband, I was his Sergeant."

"Oh it was awful, there were rumours that he was giving the Germans secret information. I have never heard anything so outrageous in my life. He was one of the finest young men you could ever meet." Tears began to swell in her eyes and she found it difficult to talk. "He won't rest well in his grave, not until his murderer is brought to justice."

He husband placed a reassuring hand on her arm. She took a tissue out of the front pocket of her piny and held it up to her face, the soft white paper covered her mouth and the lower part of hr nose.

"Many awful things happened in those dark days in the trenches."

With his lunch box safely packed in his ruck sack he set off on his bicycle down towards the sea shore, the sun was shinning, reflecting on the sea in between the small collection of fishing boats. The bicycle came to a halt, he looked around the natural harbour, a haze hung over the water making him involuntarily narrow his eyes. Turning to his left he could see his destination. At the end of the spit of land that reached out into the sea, high on the outcrop of rock sat the castle. It sent his thoughts back to his childhood when he had read the novel Dracular, the castle he now looked at was just how he had imagined the castle in Bram Stokers story.

Dismounting his ride he pushed the machine up the steep cobbled hill. The air was thin today and he was quite breathless on reaching the top.

Leaving his bicycle against on of the huts made from the upturned hull of an old boat he made his way up yet another up hill path to the castle entrance.

The interior of the castle was cool, a slight smell of damp met his nostrils as he entered the various rooms.

Climbing a staircase he noticed a doorway marked 'Upper Terrace'. He opened the door and stepped into the sunlight. From that high vantage point he could see most of the island. Following the line of the outcrop of land he had cycled along he could clearly see the ruins of the priory and beyond the huddled together houses, then the church. The church was his next calling point.

He took a deep breath of air and looked down at the small people walking both too and from the castle.

One figure didn't walk either way, it just looked toward it. Nobby couldn't make out whether it was a man or women, the heat haze blurred the image. A shiver ran down his spine. He heard the door which led back into the interior of the building close and he knew someone else has joined him outside in the sunlight. He turned to see who the newcomer was, but no one was there. They must have changed their mind about coming outside he thought.

Turning to gaze again at the view of the island he noticed that the figure who had stood watching the castle had now gone.

His mind returned to the conversation from breakfast. He hadn't told his hosts all he knew of the late Captains death. he knew precisely what had happened that dark day in October 1918.

Rumours were rife that secret information on such things as battle plans and troop movements were finding their way into enemy hands. The source of the leak had eluded the command for several months until purely by chance Nobby was talking to a Private who served as the Captains secretary.

The man in his mid thirties was attaching messages to the rings on pigeons legs then letting them fly away back to the generals way behind the front line.

Private 'Chunky' Read stood in front of two baskets of birds, three messages were attached to the legs of the pigeons from the basket to his left, while the other four were attached to the legs of the pigeons from the right hand basket.

Nobby was somewhat curious to the chose of birds for the message carrying.

The Privates reply was somewhat none satisfactory, "Orders from the captain sir, three messages to go by pigeons from basket 'A' and the other four from basket 'B'.

To Nobby the mystery deepened as the birds were released into the dusk sky. Three of the birds headed back toward head quarters while four of the birds headed into no mans land.

"What was in those messages Private?" demanded Sergeant Harper.

"No idea sir, I am under oath not to read them."

Nobby had had an awful thought, could it be? No, surely not.

The bicycle free wheeled down the hill away from the castle. The hill was so steep that he didn't have to start to peddle until he had nearly reached the town.

The events of that dark day filled his mind. He rode the bicycle up the hill toward the church. He could see the tops of the grave stones over the dry stone wall which marked the perimeter.

He lent his ride up against the wall. he decided that before he would do what he came here to do he would sit on the wooded bench and have his lunch.

As he ate the excellent cheese and pickle sandwich that the landlady had prepared for him he had the uncomfortable feeling of been watched. Was he imagining it or had the temperature dropped suddenly? The sun was still shining and it should have been the warmest part of the day, but had could feel a definite chill coming on.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw something familiar, it was the figure he had seen earlier that morning looking up at the castle, now he, for it was defiantly a man was looking at the church. Nobby couldn't make out the features of the on looker, he seemed to be wearing some kind of hood which masked his face.

His lunch finished Nobby slowly walked through the lich-gate and started to read the epitaphs on the gravestones. He was looking for just the one name. A sense of nervous apprehension came over him as the dates became more contemporary. Finally there it was...

Captain Arthur Armstrong

We trust the soul of our
Fallen brother to Gods love.

...read the epitaph.

Nobby though of the man who lay there and thought of how he met his end.

Sergeant Nobby Harper silently walked into the Captains quarters. The room was a mere hole in the Earth off the main trench, but it offered some amount of comfort. The Captain had a bed, a desk and a bowl for washing and shaving, much more than the average soldier.

The Captain sat at his desk reading a newspaper when he realised that someone had entered the room. Slowly he looked up at the figure of his Sergeant standing six feet in front of him.

"It is customary to knock before entering Sergeant." The Captain said frowning at his officer.

Harper remained silent.

"Well?" the superior officer asked, a note of impatience in his voice.

"I have found the information leak Sir." Harper's voice was matter of fact tone.

"Well done Harper, who is it?" the Captain sat up in his chair and through the news paper down on the desk.

"Don't you know Sir?"

had Harper gone mad? Of course he didn't know, if he had have known then the culprit would have been dealt with already.

"Pigeons Sir, pigeons." Harper has not moved a muscle since his arrival, he appeared to be frozen to the spot. "Its all to do with pigeons."

"Pigeons?"

"Someone has homing pigeons that fly to the German side of no mans land Sir."

“Excellent work, who is it?”

“They look identical to ours you see Sir, they just fly in a different direction.”

“Who is it man?” shouted the Captain, now at the end of his fuse.

Harper unclipped the press stud on his leather side arm holster and took out his pistol, it came to rest by his thigh. “It’s you Sir.”

“What?” Armstrong couldn’t believe his ears, “What makes you think that Sergeant?”

“They’re your pigeons Sir.” Harper showed no emotion as he pointed the gun at Captain Armstrong.

“This is outrageous, how dare you raise a weapon at me, I’ll have you court marshalled for this.” Armstrong had gone red in the face with rage.

“I don’t think so Sir.”

“Come on then, let’s get it over with. I am obviously under arrest, are you going to take me into custody?” the Captain said these words in a mocking tone, a dangerous thing to do considering the mental state of his Sergeant.

“No point Sir, you are too well connected in high command, I am not here as your jailer, I’m here as your executioner.”

“What? You’ll hang.”

“I don’t think so Sir.”

Armstrong made a lunge for his gun belt which hung on a hook nailed into one of the roof supports. Harper emptied three bullets into the Captain’s torso.

His body fell back against the wall. as he slid down he took a towel which had been hanging on a nail with him. As his lifeless body hit the floor the towel sank onto his head obscuring the top half of his face.

As silently as he had entered Nobby left the Captain’s quarters.

He had to do it, he had to. He told himself as he looked down at Captain Arthur Armstrong’s headstone.

Why had such a good man gone over to the enemy?

There was that strange figure again. Standing on the other side of the grave yard, he hadn’t seen him pass, how had he got in?

A thought ran through his mind, he took in a sharp breath and shivered. What had he been thinking, he must have been out of his mind, it was the guns, the constant sound of the firing guns. They had warped his mind, he can't have been think straight. The Captain wasn't sending messages to the enemy, it was his secretary Chunky Read, he was the one.

Oh no what had he done?

His breathing suddenly increased, his heart thumped louder and louder in his chest. Slowly he looked up at the figure watching him. The figure had not been looking at the castle or the church, it was him he was the one being watched.

Slowly the figure lifted its head for the first time. Under the cowl was the white drawn face of Captain Arthur Armstrong, his two eyes black and bulging out of their sockets.

In sheer abject fear Nobby turned and ran.

Out side of the church yard wall he wrestled with his bicycle before finally mounting it and peddling off down the road as quickly as he possibly could. He turned his head back toward the grave yard. The figure was gone.

Turning to view the road once more his heart skipped a beat as he saw the ghostly spectre no more then ten feet in front of him. He swerved to avoid it. faster and faster he paddled the machine, again he turned back, nothing.

Nobby rode down the hill, head down he went faster and faster, he looked up. There directly in front of him was the phantom, laughing. Nobby took his hands off of the handlebars and shielded his eyes with his fore arms, a collision was now unavoidable.

The bicycle continued on and suddenly slowed then tipped over as it hit the fast moving current as the sea passed over the course way, the only way off of the island. The bicycle and rider were swept away in the unforgiving waters.

Nobby dragged himself onto the shore. He was not sure what had happened to him in the last three hours.

His bag remained at the B&B, he never returned to the island to retrieve it. he never returned to Holy Island again. On one occasion he stood on the Northumberland shoreline and looked

across the small stretch of water that separated the island from the mainland. He couldn't be certain, but he was sure he could see a dark figure looking back at him. He walked along the coast to the car park that marks the start of the course way but never crossed.

FINI

A Ghost of a Life

Raymond Vincent was a quiet, reserved and a very private man. It was not surprising after the life he had led, that he kept his emotional barriers constantly in place, not letting anyone see his innermost feelings was paramount or indeed sharing his private thoughts with any other person.

At the vulnerable age of seventeen he had lost his elderly father to liver failure. He had been a man who had lived life to the extreme, work hard, play hard was his motto. He had drank heavily most of his life and then at sixty he had paid the ultimate price. A kind and loving father always, Raymond had missed his guarding hand in life.

This event had changed Raymond's life indescribably, from that moment his life was no longer his own. His time was divided between his work as a computer aided design engineer and the welfare of his ageing mother. Any spare time he had was dedicated to her and the running of the house.

All the usual trappings of youth never caught hold of him, as far as he was concerned they never existed. Ten years later following the death of his mother he made the biggest and hardest decision of his life and moved into a house closer to his place of work. Leaving his old home behind he began a new life in his new abode.

Life for him had not changed as much as he had expected. His working life was back into the normal routine, starting at seven thirty in the morning and leaving at five thirty in the evening. Home life was also in a familiar cycle. Monday and Tuesday were dedicated to washing and ironing while Wednesday night was house work night. He had normally finished his domestic chores by nine o'clock so the rest of the night was his. The evening meal was normally a simple affair, pasta, a selection of vegetables all covered in some kind of cook in sauce. Resonantly though he had paused at the freezer section of his local supermarket and made a remarkable discovery, microwave meals. Starting on a cheese and pasta dish, not wanting to be too adventurous he took it home and put it in the microwave eagerly anticipating trying the slowly turning meal in the cardboard tray.

Sitting with a tray on his knee he tried the piping hot meal. Why had he been cooing with pans for all these years? He could just press a couple of buttons. The next week in the supermarket he realised that a whole new world had been opened up to him. Pilling his trolley high with curries, chillies and a whole Sunday dinner he made his way to the till.

Raymond's nights consisted of a little television and a lot of reading. He was not a fan of soap operas or reality shows so generally he turned off the set around seven thirty.

Ray sat in his living room reading, the clocks had gone back several week previous and the nights were drawing fast, what's more Christmas was looming. This would be the first without either of his parents, the thought of spending the festive season alone had not crossed his mind until now. As an attempt to try enter the spirit of the season he decided to read the Dickens novel 'A Christmas Carol.'

He was soon engrossed in the tale of the miserly old man. As he read of scrooge and his meeting with his old partners ghost Ray had the uneasy feeling that he was being watched. The feeling was so intense that he dare not look up from his book until the feeling had past.

The following night as he read of the first of three ghost to visit scrooge he had that same uneasy feeling, the old well worn saying sprang to mind, but in this instant it really did feel as though someone had walked across his grave. He deeply buried himself in his book, but as the chapter came to an end he could bare it no longer. Slowly he looked up and across the room.

Sitting in the settee under the window, curtains now closed, sat there was a slightly unnatural looking man. He was older and greyer than Ray, but bore an strange likeness to him.

Ray stared at the ghostly figure for several minutes. Somehow he knew it to be a phantom, was it a trick of his mind. Had he fallen asleep while reading the ghostly story and he was manifesting this illusion in his mind?

Each night the spectre returned sitting in the same spot saying and doing nothing, each night Ray saw and he too said nothing to the visitor. He never tried to communicate with the phantom

at all, was it out of fear? no he was enjoying having the company, the house seemed warmer with another presence.

It was a strange thing to have a ghost occupying ones living room, it was not the sort of thing he could bring up at the coffee machine at work, he would be laughed out of the building for just bringing up the subject, his colleagues minds were mostly closed on such subjects as this. So he learned to live with it.

Christmas was now only a few days away and as he put the and as he put the finished Dickens novel down on the arm of the settee he looked across at the phantasm, the two glasses of wine consumed had taken effect now, so with a large dose of Dutch courage he spoke to the ghost, "Who are you?" asked the slightly slurred voice.

The spirit seemed to pause for a moment before looking at Ray. Then it spoke, though it spoke to Ray the lips on its cold white face did not move. The voice Ray could hear speaking to him was inside his head, is this how all ghosts communicate?

The voice was chilling, but warm and friendly all at once, "I am yourself Raymond Vincent." it said.

Ray was starting to feel dizzy, the effect of the wine was taking hold, "Sorry?" he said not believing what he was hearing.

The spirit replied, "I am your own ghost and here to help you." A pause held Ray's attention desperate for more knowledge, "If you follow the path you currently walk you will die in ten years time. You will die alone in this very room, in this very chair where I now sit."

Ray was paralysed, how could he retort to such a statement. 'Hang on' he thought I don't even know if this spectre is real or just a figment of his imagination. Was he dreaming, substituting himself into the role of Scrooge?

It seemed real enough, dreams always do until you wake up that is. Why not go along with it, "How?"

"How?" the spectre started at him wearing a hard expression.

"Yes, how?" Ray no more believed in ghosts then he in aliens or the theory of Atlantis.

"You dye of boredom."

"What?"

“You are leading a senseless life.” The ghost told him in a friendly sincere voice. “Your work and read, work and read. There is more to life then this. As in the book you have read you have a chance to change your ways. Once you have done that I will no longer exist here, I will cease to be.” “But ghost,” this was difficult, how did he address the phantom. The phantom of his older self. Should he call him Ray, Raymond, Phantom or one of the many other synonyms for a visitation from the dead. In the end he decided that ghost was as good as anything else. “You have become, well a companion, a friend?”

“Then,” said the ghost in a melancholy voice, “I will return every night until I, you die.”

Roy sat and thought. He poured himself yet another (a third) glass of wine. After a few moments contemplation he spoke quietly, “What must I do?”

The phantom looked up at the clock, it was eleven o’clock. “tomorrow night at seven o’clock, be ready.”

Ray felt his head spinning. His next recollection was waking up, lying on the settee, the time was now a little past three I the morning. He looked over at the other sofa, no one was there.

Had he been dreaming? On the chair arm the copy of A Christmas Carol lay just where he had left it hours previously, an empty wine glass sat by the foot of the fire. His head thumped and his mouth had the feeling of a rather deep pile carpet.

The following evening he had followed his usual routine, tea, washing up, TV and book.

As the clock hit seven the shimmering apparition appeared siting on the settee under the window.

“Are you ready?” said the voice in his head.

Ray nearly jumped off of the chair. It was real then, the phantom had returned as promised on time. After the previous nights drinking Ray had imagined the who saga of the ghost to be part of a alcohol assisted dream.

The phantom had returned as promised on time. “Come on, where going out.” The phantom gestured with a bony index

finger to follow him out of the front door. Ray followed him, he couldn't help himself, he felt compelled to follow just as a salmon swims upstream to lay its eggs.

As he closed the front door behind him he turned to follow the ghost and found himself in a dark noisy bar.

Scattered around the bar were a large number of people all of various ages, all standing wearing slightly embarrassed expressions on their faces.

"Where are we Phantom?" Ray was not used to being in public houses. Being around people unsettled him, people he didn't know anyway. His work colleagues were different of course. He knew all of them much better than any of them knew him. In that environment he had the advantage, here he didn't. This was no man's land open fields, no protection.

"This is a singles bar." The phantom told him, "People come here to meet."

Most of the people in the hostelry were paired up. They seemed to be like him, lacking self confidence, and self esteem all standing next to a friend of the same sex for moral support. "It is customary to buy a drink when in these places." Prompted the ghost.

Ah, that could be a problem. He hadn't brought any money out with him.

"Your right hand pocket." Said the phantom as Ray opened his mouth to speak.

Ray checked his pocket and found two crisp twenty pound notes. That was one problem solved. Next, what to drink? He cast his eye along the pumps on the bar then the optics hanging down along the rear mirrored wall. He eventually settled for a pint of bitter. The taste was not unpleasant. He turned to his friend the ghost and was about to ask if he would like a drink then realised he couldn't.

"Well, what know phantom?" asked Ray wiping the froth from his top lip.

"The general idea is to meet and talk to people. Take a look around, do you see anyone you like the look of?"

Ray looked around the pub. There were many economically dressed young women, way out of his league. He was too old for many of them to even contemplate sparing him a second glance, or so he thought. He turned his attention to a quieter corner of the bar. No loud speakers pumped out mindless rhythms here. Two pairs of women sat in that area, both pairs of a similar age to Ray.

Prompted by his companion Ray edged toward the end of the bar closest to the women. one of the women from the pair to the left of the alcove stood up and walked toward the bar, only after a prod of encouragement from hr friend. "Offer to buy her a drink." Whispered the ghost.

The women arrived at he bar. A look of embarrassment flushed her cheeks, an expression mirrored by Rays' features. "Er, could I, that is, if you don't mind, possibly, buy you a drink?" the words came out disjointed and nervously.

The women smiled, her face lighting up as she did so, "Yes, that would be nice. Martini please."

An unconscious bond had been formed. Ray returned her smile on hearing her agreement, was this the start of something? "Ray." He said offering his name in way of introduction.

"Emma," she replied.

"What about your friend, what would she like to drink?"

"My friend?" she asked with a puzzled expression on her face.

"Yes, over there..." he looked into the corner. Only the other pair of women sat there. "Strange, I could have sworn..." he turned to look at his friend for one of those reassuring looks.

As he turned all he saw was the bar, there was no sign of the ghost.

It had happened as predicted, if Rays life changed course then the phantom would cease to be. It would appear that the ghost was right after all.

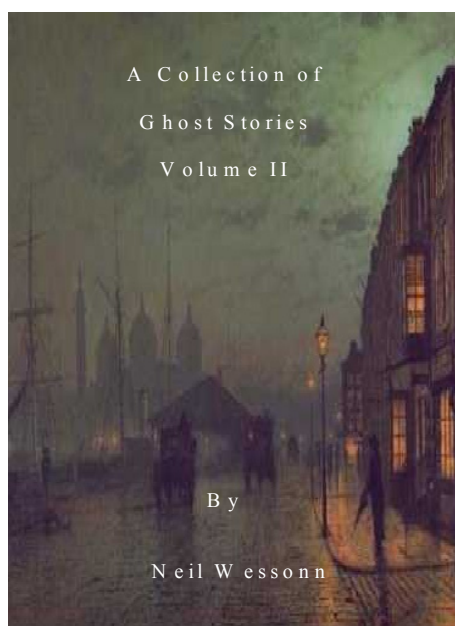
FINI

A very imaginative work, mysterious, chilling in places and quite unusual. Well done. The weird customs of people just 400 years before are shown brilliantly.

Review of **The Search for Melton Top**, from BBC's H2G2 Website.

This story (and writer) from what I have read are excellent. In my opinion he could possible be the find of 2005.

Review of **Terimal**, from the BBC's H2G2 Website.



Due out
for Christmas
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